

The background of the entire page is a blue-tinted image. On the left side, a hand is shown holding a wooden gavel, with the head of the gavel resting on a set of architectural blueprints. The blueprints are detailed with various lines, shapes, and dimensions, including numbers like '1.09', '79', '3.31', '1.48', and '10'. The overall aesthetic is professional and technical.

HYBRID HEARINGS

IMPROVEMENT INITIATIVE



Report and findings by the
National Center for State Courts

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Hybrid Hearings Improvement Initiative would not have been possible without collaboration from the entities included here. For many months, these groups spent hours brainstorming, troubleshooting, laughing, and crying (possibly) – all with the same goal in mind: to provide better hybrid hearings and increased and equal access to justice for all.

National Center for State Courts Project Team

Overall project administration and management, technical assistance, lab series and focus group leadership, liaison with tech companies, data collection and analysis.

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Technology Sponsors

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INTRODUCTION

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 ushered in a new way of thinking about in-person interactions. Out of necessity, courts responded by transitioning activities traditionally held in a courtroom to online platforms that facilitated court appearances using any technology available. These early solutions often involved a combination of existing audio and video equipment, manual workarounds, and a lot of trial and error.

As courts emerged from the pandemic, it was clear that the benefits and conveniences born from these new solutions would become a permanent part of court operations. It was also during this time that courts began to turn their attention to improving first-generation remote and hybrid hearing technology.

Courts are now using remote and hybrid hearings throughout all 50 states in differing degrees for both civil and criminal case types. By definition, a hybrid hearing is one in which at least one participant is attending from the courtroom using the room's audio/video infrastructure and at least one participant is attending remotely either via videoconferencing platform or phone, using either audio, video or both.

But when and how remote and hybrid hearings are used varies by jurisdiction. Challenges related to funding; technology; facilities; staffing; and processes, procedures, and policies play an integral role in adoption of the technology.

Through the Hybrid Hearings Improvement Initiative, the National Center for State Courts (NCSC) connected consultants and technology vendors with court organizations to improve upon their pandemic-era hybrid hearings practices. Recognizing the significant impact of remote and hybrid proceedings, NCSC has made this focus area a strategic priority.

In 2022, courts of all shapes and sizes were selected to participate in the pilot project — which provided technical assistance and funding for equipment and/or installation, hardware, software, integration, and training. NCSC conducted focus groups to identify challenges, define solution requirements and develop viable solutions. A lab series was also offered to connect courts to collaborate and exchange ideas.

In the end, the Hybrid Hearings Improvement Initiative reached courts in 28 states, 2 territories, and 1 tribal court. NCSC staff worked with them to develop and test technology, policies, and practices to help inform new guidelines and best practices. Additionally, technology vendors gained new insights and identified opportunities for solution improvements and enhancements from their collaborations with pilot sites.

In the pages of this report, you will see examples of successful implementations and ones with a few (or many) challenges. You will also gain practical guidance and numerous resources for overcoming challenges related to funding; technology; facilities; staffing; and processes, procedures, and policies when starting or expanding on a hybrid hearings project.

We hope the following findings and recommendations will inspire new ideas and further motivate organizations to enhance hybrid hearing capabilities to improve equal justice for all.

COURT PARTNERS

Pilot Sites

Courts with a demonstrated need for an enhanced technology solution to make their hybrid hearing experience viable. These courts were paired with participating court technology vendors to develop a solution and were eligible to receive funding of up to \$13,000 to implement the solution.

Alaska Court System

Bethel County Court, Bethel, Alaska

Phoenix Municipal Court

Phoenix, Arizona

Eleventh Judicial Circuit of Florida

Miami, Florida

Superior Court of Carroll County

Carrollton, Georgia

Knox County Superior Court

Vincennes, Indiana

14A District Court

Ann Arbor, Michigan

Hinds County Youth Court

Jackson, Mississippi

New Hampshire Circuit Courts

Concord, New Hampshire

New Mexico Supreme Court

Santa Fe, New Mexico

394th District Court, Brewster County

Alpine, Texas

Salt Lake City Justice Court

Salt Lake City, Utah

White Earth Tribal Court

White Earth, Minnesota

Technical Assistance

Courts with all or part of a working hybrid solution in place and a demonstrated need for some level of technical support, whether it be related to policy, operations, or documentation of processes.

10th Judicial Administrative District of Georgia

Athens, Georgia

Judiciary of Guam

Hagatna, Guam

11th Circuit Court

Manistique, Michigan

54-B District Court

East Lansing, Michigan

8th Judicial District Court, Colfax County

Raton, New Mexico

Court of First Instance

San Juan, Puerto Rico

8th Region North Child Protection Court

Gainesville, Texas

35th District Court

Brownwood, Texas

City of Victoria Municipal Court

Victoria, Texas

Clark County District Court

Vancouver, Washington

San Juan County Superior Court

Friday Harbor, Washington

Case Studies

Courts with hybrid solutions with elements that can be replicated in other jurisdictions.

Superior Court of Mohave County

Kingman, Arizona

Superior Court of California, Los Angeles County

Los Angeles, California

19th Judicial Circuit

Waukegan, Illinois

Marion Superior Court

Indianapolis, Indiana

District Court of Hamilton County

Syracuse, Kansas

Orleans Parish Court

New Orleans, Louisiana

Massachusetts Appeals Court

Boston, Massachusetts

Ramsey County District Court, 2nd Judicial District

St. Paul, Minnesota

Akron Municipal Court

Akron, Ohio

Webb County Court at Law II

Laredo, Texas

Circuit Court Branch 2

Manitowoc, Wisconsin

Kentucky Administrative Office of the Courts

Frankfort, Kentucky



GRANTS

Chapter 1:

FUNDING

Conversations about new and improved ways of doing business many times start with comments like, “That would be great, but how are we going to pay for that?”

Funding for courts varies significantly throughout the country. Currently, most court funding comes from a combination of state and local government sources. However, these budgets are typically limited and often may not fully meet the needs of courts and their users.

By thinking more broadly about funding sources and looking to alternatives like grants and partnerships, courts can find new ways to fund initiatives like hybrid hearings improvements. Courts should also find ways to leverage data to demonstrate the advantages of remote and hybrid hearings and to justify the need for court technology expansion.

RESOURCES

-  **“Dos” and “Do Nots” for State Courts Facing Budget Challenges**
This document reflects on lessons learned by state courts from the Great Recession that started in 2008.
-  **Tiny Case Studies: Dedicated grant management staff help courts obtain funding, ensure compliance, and expand court services**
A case study that looks at three courts that obtained grant funding for innovations and positions.
-  **Just Horizons: Charting the Future of the Courts**
Guidance for courts to anticipate and prepare for future challenges and opportunities affecting the delivery of high-quality justice to all.
-  **State Justice Institute Grants**
Information about grant opportunities available through the State Justice Institute.
-  **Data Dive #3 - Data Storytelling**
This data visualization introduces how data storytelling can be used to present information by integrating traditional text and visuals to simplify information and highlight key insights.

HYBRID HEARINGS IMPROVEMENT INITIATIVE BY THE NUMBERS

100
APPLICANTS

12
PILOT SITES

12
CASE STUDIES

11
COURTS RECEIVED
TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

65
COURTS PARTICIPATED
IN THE IMPLEMENTATION
LAB SERIES



Chapter 2:

TECHNOLOGY

Technology for hybrid hearings varies widely among state courts. Some courts had remote and hybrid systems they could leverage before the pandemic, while others improvised with spare equipment during and after.

To successfully implement new technology solutions for court proceedings moving forward, it is important for courts to consider the perspectives of both users and staff; ensuring that court participants can access the system and court staff can operate it easily.

It is also important for courts to define their MVP (Minimum Viable Product) to develop sustainable technology solutions. MVPs are the “smallest thing you can build that delivers customer value.”¹ Executing MVPs involves selecting appropriate hardware and software, training staff, and establishing defined operational processes.

■ Case Study

■ Pilot Site

COURT CHALLENGES

Minimizing Impact on Court Staff

Los Angeles County Superior Court
Los Angeles, California

11

Identifying the MVP

Superior Court of Carroll County
Carrollton, Georgia

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Developing a Broadband Infrastructure for Video

Bethel Superior Court
Bethel County, Alaska

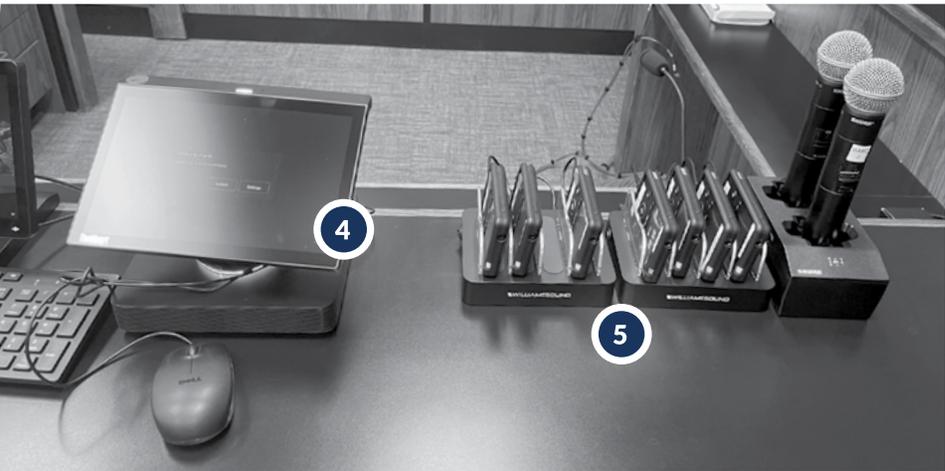
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SUMMARY

Best Practices & Resources

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¹ <https://ask.leanstack.com/en/articles/902991-what-is-a-minimum-viable-product-mvp>



Minimizing Impact on Court Staff

Superior Court of California, Los Angeles County

Los Angeles, California — The Superior Court of California, Los Angeles County, utilized remote and hybrid hearings before the pandemic and has now incorporated them into standard operations and courtroom design.

Courtrooms are equipped with cameras and microphones, and many have Digital Evidence Presentation Systems (DEPS) which provide video output for key participants (judge, witness, and court reporter) through a 65-inch display monitor. Video input connections are also available, along with a document camera on counsel tables and video switching equipment on the judge’s bench.

Court reporting and video conferencing systems are not integrated and require the judicial assistant (JA) to start the recording on a separate computer. Additionally, the system does not easily accommodate spoken language interpreters and requires the use of a separate court-provided phone.

When considering system updates and modifications, the impact on the JA has been a critical factor. Reducing the number of technology touchpoints has led to a significantly improved quality of service. This court also discovered the importance of ensuring that technology does not overwhelm the judicial officer, court staff, attorneys, and the public when future-proofing systems for expandability and adaptability.

BY THE NUMBERS

10M

POPULATION SERVED

700K

ANNUAL FILING VOLUME

\$69.3M

ANNUAL TECHNOLOGY BUDGET

220

NUMBER OF STAFF DEDICATED TO TECHNOLOGY

TECHNOLOGY SOLUTIONS

- 1** **Digital Evidence Presentation System (DEPS)** includes a 65-inch display monitor.
- 2** **Monitor** equipped with camera on judge’s bench.
- 3** **Touchscreen control panel** for courtroom technology
- 4** **Lenovo ThinkSmart Hub** Meeting controller for Microsoft Teams allowing the manager to deploy, monitor, manage, and troubleshoot all hub devices from one centralized location.
- 5** **WAV Pro Wi-Fi Receiver and Charging Hub** This is a dedicated assistive listening receiver allowing users to connect via Bluetooth, personal headphones, and hearing aids.
- 6** **Lavalier and hand microphones** to ensure clear audio
- 7** **Document cameras** on the counsel tables



Identifying the Minimum Viable Product (MVP)

Superior Court of Carroll County, Georgia

Carrollton, Georgia — The Superior Court of Carroll County in Georgia has a courtroom inside the Carroll County Jail for arraignments and bail hearings. At the start of the pilot, virtual hearings were held with improvised equipment that needed improvements to effectively support the increasing number of remote hearings.

The jail courtroom and the courthouse were connected through two laptops equipped with webcams and microphones. Although security cameras are present in the courtroom, they are not integrated with the other technology and therefore are not used for hybrid hearings. During hybrid hearings, the laptop cameras were placed on the judge's bench and pointed toward the courtroom to facilitate remote connection with the jail courtroom. This arrangement required the judge to move from behind the bench and stand in the center of the courtroom for the parties to see the judge properly.

The Superior Court of Carroll County determined that their Minimum Viable Product (MVP) required updating equipment and space reconfiguration to result in a more efficient, safe, and cost-effective system.

The MVP (Minimum Viable Product) is defined as the “smallest thing you can build that delivers customer value.”²

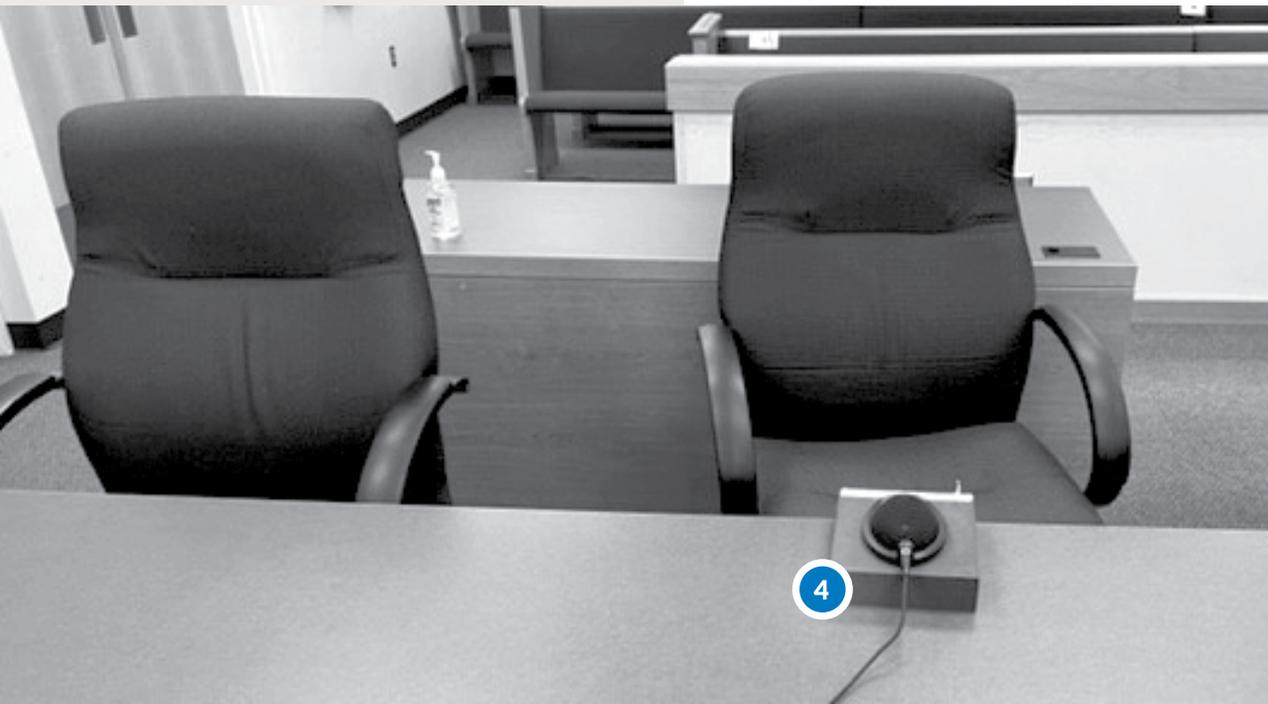
² <https://ask.leanstack.com/en/articles/902991-what-is-a-minimum-viable-product-mvp>

TECHNOLOGY SOLUTIONS

- 1 Superior Court of Carroll County courtroom
- 2 The Carroll County Jail courtroom was created to accommodate remote hearings.
- 3 Laptops on the judge's benches connect the courtroom and the county jail.
- 4 A judges' bench with safety glass provides a secure, transparent barrier ensuring courtroom protection.

FACILITY SOLUTIONS

- 1 LCD screen to monitor remote participants.
- 2 Lavalier microphones and receiver
- 3 Boundary Microphones
The microphones are designed for spoken word applications in meeting and conferencing based environments
- 4 Moveable microphones at counsel tables



Developing a Broadband Infrastructure for Video

Bethel Superior Court

Bethel County, Alaska — The Bethel Superior Court serves 56 remote villages primarily inhabited by Alaska Natives. Transportation to the courthouse can require travel by air, boat, or snowmachine. Internet access in the villages is limited to cell phones and not available in residences, often requiring people to connect through other community locations such as tribal offices and schools.

The court has adopted a hybrid model for remote court hearings, with over 70% of the 17,834 hearings held in 2021 being conducted remotely. The court uses a sound system that allows for simultaneous language interpretation during court hearings via telephone and Zoom. The system offers four 4-channel analog outputs to the server room for primary CourtSmart recording and a single combined analog channel for backup recording.

Like others across the country, the court has faced challenges in setting up a community broadband infrastructure to support the use of video. Bethel Superior Court's early success with hybrid hearings was because the court was able to work with what it had: the telephone. Although not provided through pilot funding, the recent addition of Starlink satellite services in the region indicates a potential for expanding digital usage and video capabilities in the area.

21M

NUMBER OF AMERICANS WHO LACK ACCESS TO BROADBAND INTERNET

COURT BROADBAND CONSIDERATIONS

Around 21 million Americans lack access to broadband internet, while many others face limited access due to financial constraints or sporadic data plans.³ Some smartphone users also experience unreliable coverage, with data limitations and frequent connectivity issues. Jurisdictions like the Hinds County Youth Court in Jackson, Miss., have installed access points to assist users who have unreliable internet and Wi-Fi connections.

³ <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/fact-sheets/2019/07/21-million-americans-still-lack-broadband-connectivity>

STRATEGIES

- ✓ **Utilize kiosks if feasible.** Identify key locations within the community for access and provide information about local areas that offer free Wi-Fi such as schools, libraries, or other businesses.
- ✓ **Promote increased broadband access** within the community if appropriate.
- ✓ Ensure **phone** participation is available.
- ✓ Consider **partnering with local agencies** to determine eligibility for federal grants to expand broadband access in their state/area.

BEST PRACTICES | TECHNOLOGY

✔ Identify your Minimum Viable Product

The critical pieces of hybrid hearing MVPs include:

- Proper hardware and software
- Trained staff to support hearings
- Defined operational processes

✔ Access to Justice

Remote and hybrid hearings can improve access to justice and enable court users to handle court business without having to travel long distances, take off time from work, arrange childcare, or pay for transportation.

Courts that cover geographically large areas like the 14A District Court in Ann Arbor, Mich., have established a satellite access point in a smaller community that allows users to participate in proceedings closer to home. Additionally, the New Hampshire Circuit Court in Concord has a mobile access point to accommodate petitioners in domestic violence injunction cases who need privacy and confidentiality when requesting critical court resources and protections.

When implementing new technology solutions, consider access to justice concerns to provide a balanced service delivery model.

Considerations include:

- Providing online business options (e-filing, e-forms, e-information)
- Offering solutions to pay fines and fees online
- Providing real-time help to self-represented litigants

✔ Technology Solutions

- Future-proof systems – allow for expandability and adaptability
- Ensure all staff can use the technology
- Consider access to justice concerns

✔ Selecting the Technology Platform

Assess technology regularly to determine necessary updates. Keep guiding principles in mind when integrating technology into court processes. Your remote hearing policy should consider language access and disability accommodations when making technology decisions. NCSC has developed an online tool, PDF and booklet to help courts integrate guiding principles.



Download
the resource

ncsc.org/exitingtech

Key Questions about Technology Platforms

- Do court staff find it easy to use?
- Are court users able to easily connect to the platform?
- Have new platforms been tested by court staff and users?
- Will the platform support simultaneous interpretation?
- Does the platform allow for captioning and other accessibility requirements?
- Does the platform have recording functionality?
- Can hearings on the platform be used to establish the official court record?
- Does the platform allow for viewing and exchanging documents?
- What is the cost of the platform?
- Will there be a cost to court users? If yes, consider another platform to ensure access and avoid due process concerns.
- If changing platforms, what steps need to be taken to ensure continuity of services?
- Is the platform secure?
- Does the platform provide options to ensure courtroom decorum (e.g. to display a standard message, mute or remove participants if necessary, etc.)

Key Questions for Contracting Digital Services

- Who owns the data created when using the platform?
- How does this use intersect with privacy laws and public record laws in your jurisdiction?
- What steps will your court need to take to ensure that data is protected?
- How will data errors that impact court users be handled?
- Who is responsible for providing platform support?
- Will your court and court users be able to adapt and modify the technology to meet any changing needs of the court?
- If court users must go to the platform company for tech support, what does this look like?
- How will updates to the platform be handled?
- Will you need to purchase new licenses during the course of the engagement?

RESOURCES



NCSC's Exiting Technology Projects

Handbook assists procurement officers in evaluating prospective vendor contracts or bids, or document project progress.



NCSC Court Innovation Lab

A space for showcasing, demonstrating, and testing new court and courtroom technology.



Making sense of MVP

An article by Henrik Kniberg that discusses the benefits of identifying a minimum viable product (MVP).



Love the Problem, Not Your Solution

A LEANSTACK blog post that encourages readers to understand problems before creating solutions.



NCSC Remote Proceeding Toolkit

Provides courts with considerations and guidance for adopting policies for remote and hybrid hearings.



Chapter 3:

FACILITIES

Hybrid hearing courtrooms pose a new challenge for architects and planners as they consider how virtual and tangible spaces and parties integrate with each other. Whether retrofitting a historic courthouse; reimagining, remodeling, or expanding an existing space; or building a new, state-of-the-art, future-ready courthouse, flexibility is key when designing spaces for hybrid courtrooms.

To maximize resources, jurisdictions like the White Earth Tribal Court in Minnesota have repurposed conference rooms with updated technology to expand their capacity to hold video remote proceedings.

Variables such as space configurations and unique local needs inhibit the ability to identify a “one size fits all” design solution to support hybrid hearings.

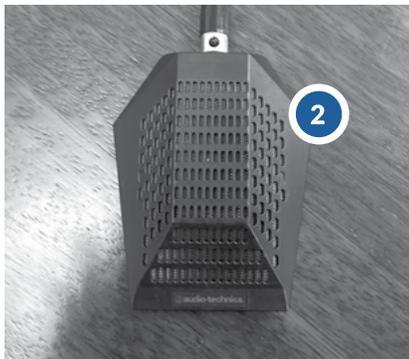
■ Case Study ■ Pilot Site

COURT CHALLENGES

| | |
|---|----|
| Retrofitting a Historic Courthouse 394th District Court, Brewster County <i>Alpine, Texas</i> | 21 |
| Creating a Mixed-Use Space Superior Court of Mohave County <i>Kingman, Arizona</i> | 23 |
| Expanding a Courthouse 19th Judicial Circuit <i>Waukegan, Illinois</i> | 25 |
| Future-Proofing a New Courthouse Marion Superior Court <i>Indianapolis, Indiana</i> | 27 |
| Creating a Customer-Centric Resource Center Salt Lake City Justice Court <i>Salt Lake City, Utah</i> | 29 |

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| Best Practices & Resources | 31 |
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FACILITY SOLUTIONS

- 1 Five microphone stations for the judge, witness, stand-alone podium, state and defense tables. All stations include status LEDs, integrated speakers, and headphone jacks for assisted listening or interpretation.
- 2 The boundary microphone can be used at the jury box or judge's bench for sidebars.
- 3 The audio interface serves as a preamp for microphones and also allows for audio control



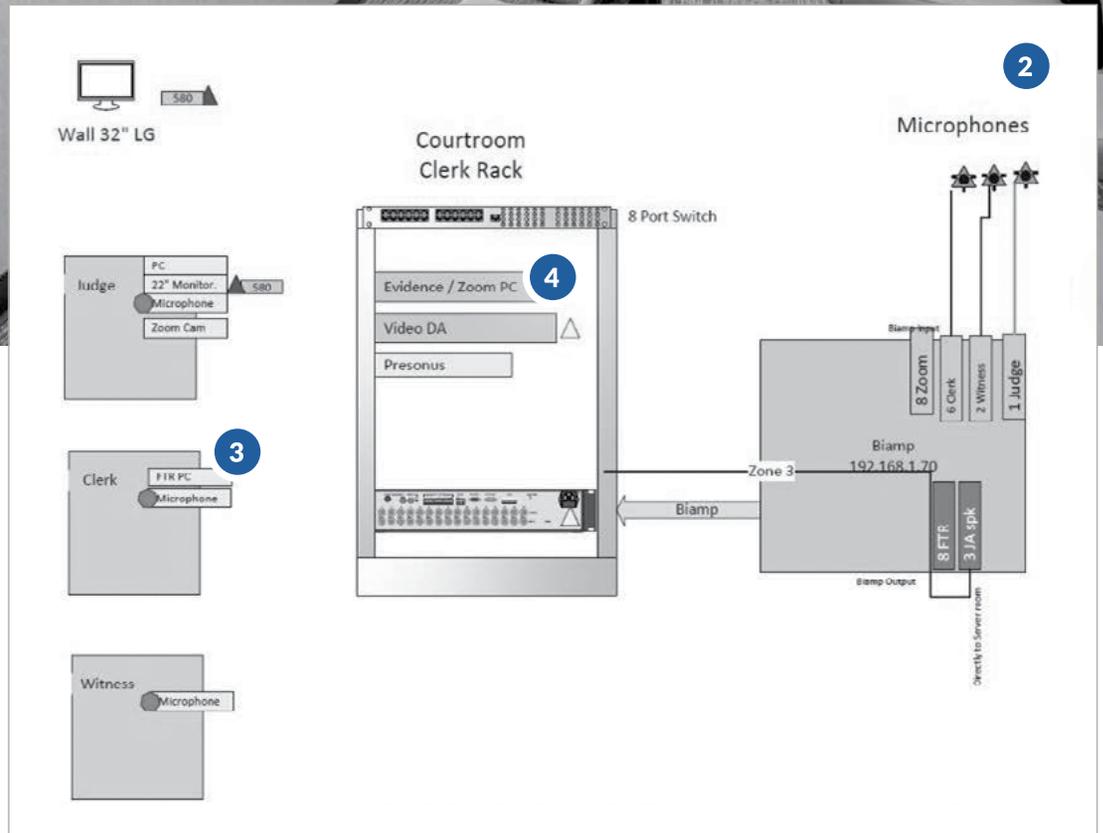
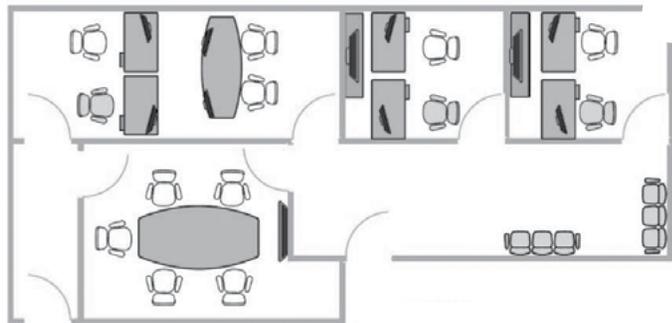
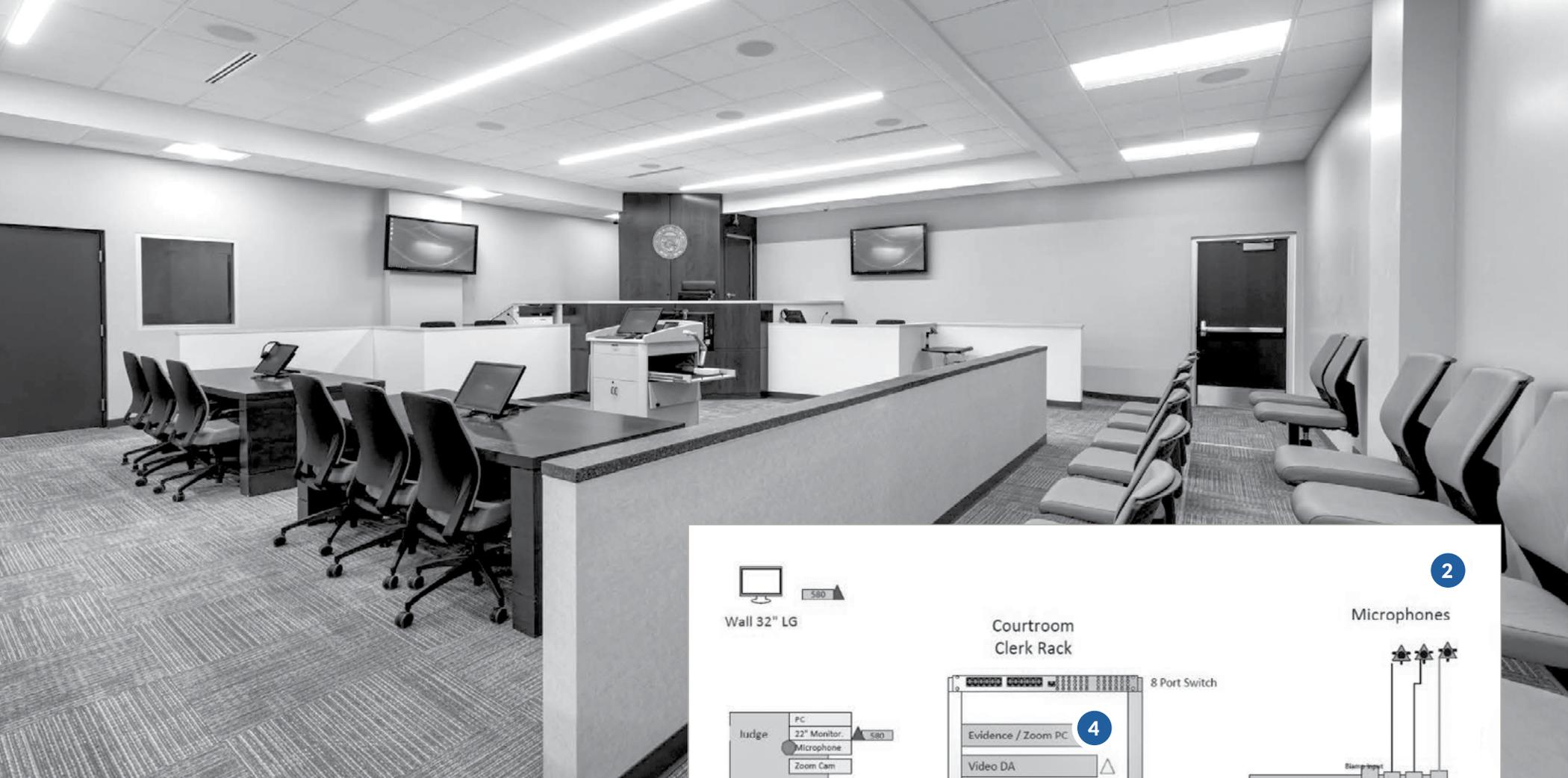


Retrofitting a Historic Courthouse

394th District Court, Brewster County

Alpine, Texas — The 1887 Brewster County Courthouse faced challenges with sound and audio quality during remote and hybrid court proceedings, which is a common issue in many historic courthouses. The original solution – lavalier microphones connected to speakers – proved ineffective and any proposed solution needed to preserve the courtroom configuration and millwork.

Using the Televic/Biamp Hybrid Hearing Core Audio Solution, the court was able to strategically place five stations with microphones to provide direct and uninterrupted audio for all individuals. The solution, along with supplemental microphones, reduces acoustic obstacles and captures the audio for the court record. This standalone court system also includes a sidebar feature and can support future improvements and expansion as needed.



Creating a Mixed-Use Space

Superior Court of Mohave County

Kingman, Arizona — Shortly after the technology-driven Mohave County Superior Court opened the doors to its new courthouse in 2020, court and county leaders transformed an underutilized courtroom into a mixed-use virtual video experience. The converted courtroom includes two video booths, one each for the judge and clerk; a hybrid hearing room that allows in-person participation from the judge, clerk and up to two attorneys; and a multipurpose video room to host mediations and other hearings. This setup enables remote participants, including remote jurors, to participate in each type of proceeding. By adopting this approach, one traditional courtroom space was converted into four video booths while also saving taxpayer dollars.

FACILITY SOLUTIONS

- 1 Judge video booth
- 2 Clerk video booth
- 3 FTR (For the Record) PC on the Clerk's desk captures audio and video for hearings, as well as monitors and controls the hybrid hearing.
- 4 Evidence/Zoom PC stores and screenshares digital evidence.

BY THE NUMBERS

221K

POPULATION
SERVED

7,800

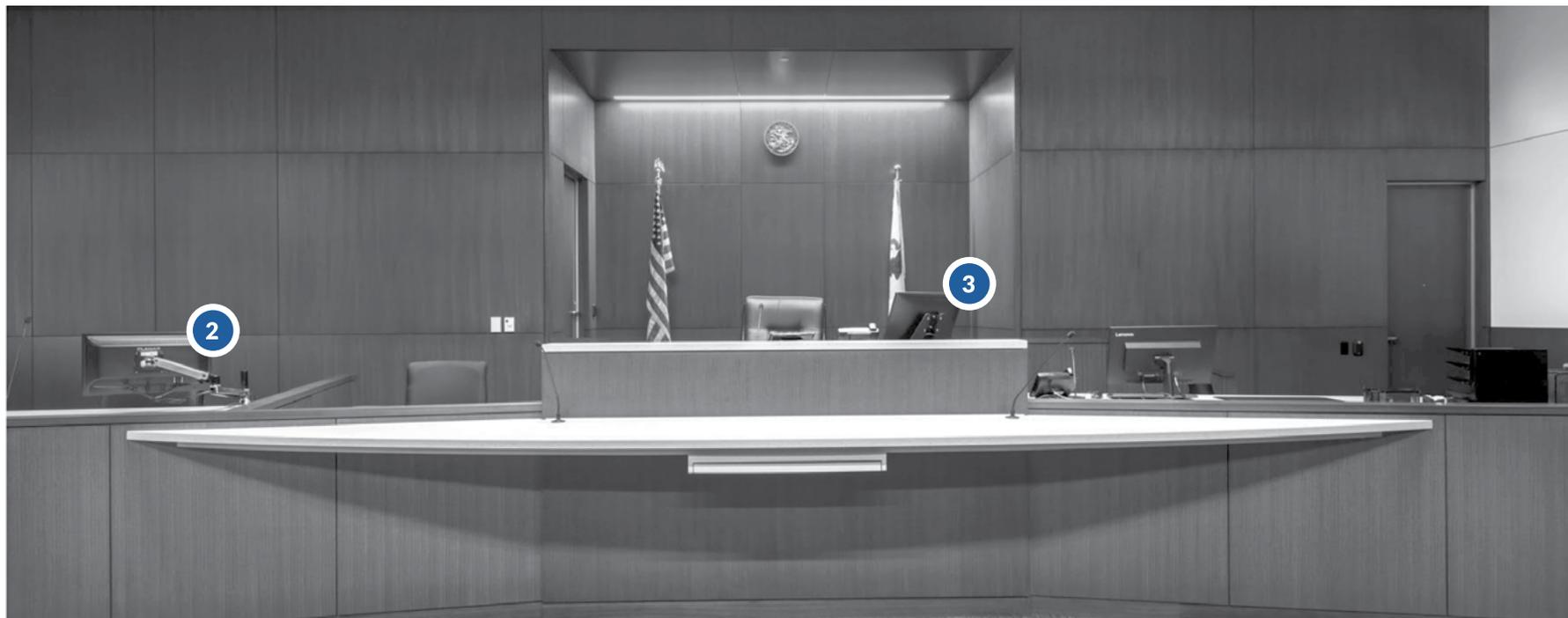
ANNUAL
FILING VOLUME

\$968,500

ANNUAL
TECHNOLOGY BUDGET

.5

NUMBER OF STAFF
DEDICATED
TO TECHNOLOGY



Expanding a Courthouse

19th Judicial Circuit

Waukegan, Illinois — The Lake County Courthouse underwent an expansion in 2018 to increase efficiency and support future growth of the justice system and its agencies. The expansion added 17 new courtrooms and included numerous upgrades to the courtroom’s AV equipment, such as cameras and microphones, to facilitate remote and hybrid hearings. The courtrooms are equipped with AV equipment in various locations, including benches, attorney tables, podiums, and witness stands. Zoom is used as the videoconferencing platform, and a centralized electronic court reporting (ECR) room is available for an operator to monitor up to four courtrooms simultaneously. The system also accommodates language interpreters who appear in person or telephonically.

BY THE NUMBERS

709K

POPULATION
SERVED

60K

ANNUAL
FILING VOLUME

\$26M

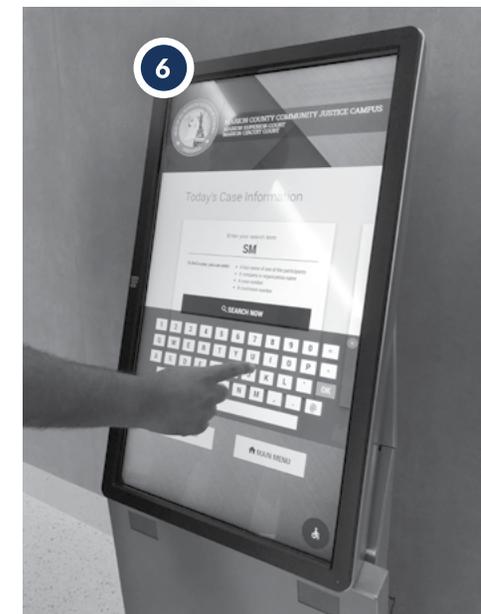
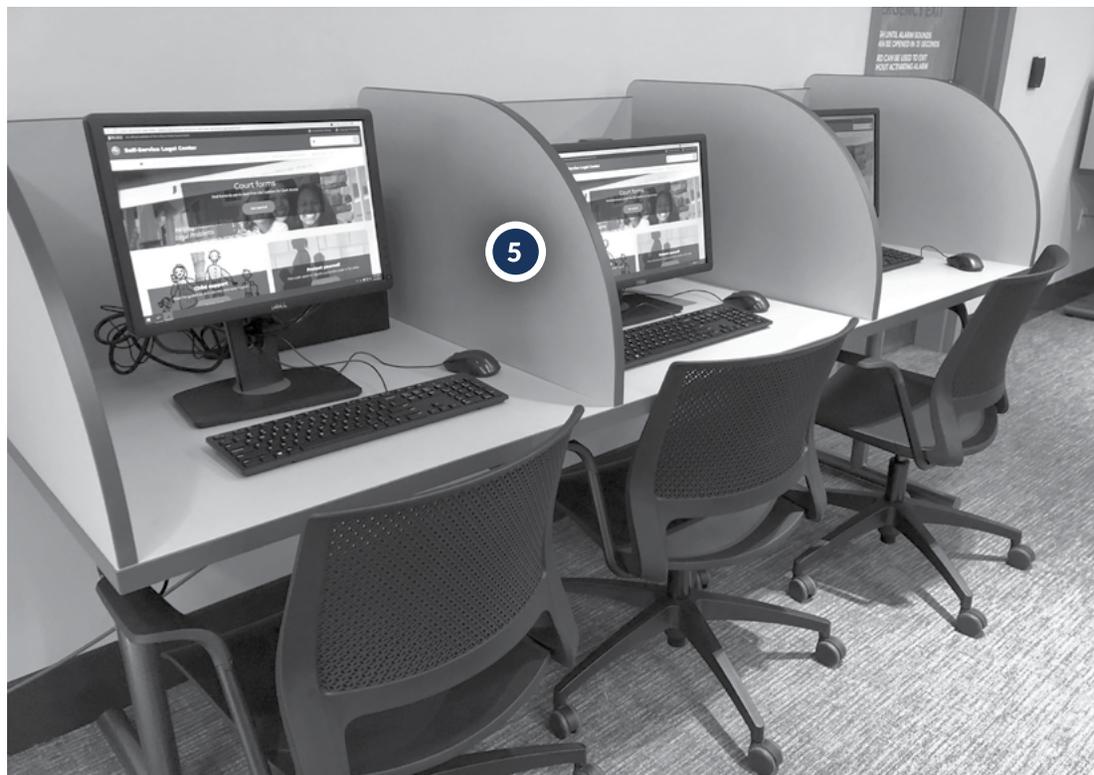
ANNUAL
TECHNOLOGY
BUDGET

9

NUMBER OF STAFF
DEDICATED
TO TECHNOLOGY

FACILITY SOLUTIONS

- 1 Jury microphones
- 2 LCD monitor on witness stand
- 3 Judge’s bench with monitor and a boundary microphone for remote participants



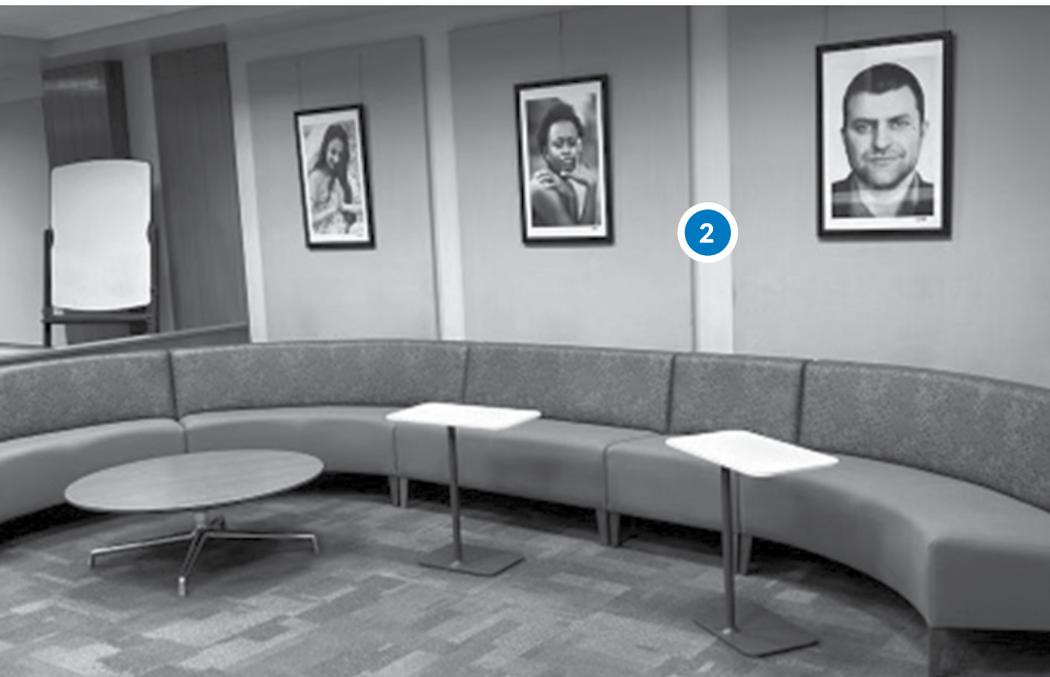
Future-Proofing a New Courthouse

Marion County Superior Court

Indianapolis, Indiana — To meet both current and future needs, the Indianapolis Community Justice Center has implemented state-of-the-art technology in its 71 courtrooms. This advanced technology allows for hybrid hearings featuring remote witness testimony and direct connectivity with the jail. Additionally, all public court hearings are recorded and can be made available on demand. The courtroom technology includes automated scheduling, digitization and display of evidence, efficient juror evidence review, and secure attorney-client conference rooms. Additional features include wayfinding navigation kiosks, kiosks to make court-ordered payments, digital signage, and a staffed information desk. To improve the effectiveness of these advancements, all court staff have received training on Microsoft Teams, WebEx, Zoom, and Blue Jeans software. Court staff also provide free courtroom technology training for attorneys and law students.

FACILITY SOLUTIONS

- 1 Digital displays in the jury box
- 2 Digital displays for dockets
- 3 Wayfinding kiosks
- 4 Bench controller
- 5 Self-help stations
- 6 Information kiosks



Creating a Customer-Centric Resource Center

Salt Lake City Justice Court

Salt Lake City, Utah — The Salt Lake City Justice Court worked with justice system partners to repurpose an underutilized courtroom into a full-service, customer-centric resource center that is flexible and adaptable to the evolving court service needs. The center – which includes remote access booths, meeting space, and comfortable waiting areas – serves as a hub for court operations while providing customers with one-stop convenience for participating in court-sanctioned activities or justice-partner meetings. Working closely with Salt Lake County and other justice partners, the court’s innovative approach to space planning created a comprehensive, one-stop location that prioritizes the needs of its users.



FACILITY SOLUTIONS

- 1** Before: Courtroom prior to repurposing
- 2** After: Waiting area
- 3** After: Remote access booths



BEST PRACTICES | FACILITIES

✓ Quality Assurance

- Obtain stakeholder commitment to ensure all parties invest in the required technical equipment and training.
- Consider whether the network bandwidth can support the additional requirements of video conferencing and digital evidence.
- Conduct regular system checks to ensure the equipment functions properly and backups are operational.
- Prioritize system maintenance to ensure long-term stability of equipment and systems.

✓ Stakeholder Participation and Input

Use the following list to identify stakeholders you should consider engaging in facility projects. The level of participation of members may vary.

- **Judges**
- **Court administrators and staff**
- **Courtroom staff** (clerk, bailiff, court reporters, interpreters)
- **IT staff** (court, county)
- **Attorneys** (civil/criminal, public/private)
- **Legal organizations and community partners**
- **Court users, including self-represented litigants**
- **Local government officials**
- **Local affinity groups, victim's rights organizations, and community leaders**

RESOURCES



Court Space reForm

This self-assessment tool helps courts evaluate their building and learn about courthouse design trends. It asks questions about the current courthouse and design topics of interest to define space requirements for improved court operations.



NCSC Courthouse Facility Planning Team

The Court Facility Planning Team can help design a short-term or long-term implementation plan through comprehensive strategic planning that integrates architecture, technology, security, and court operations.



NCSC Remote Proceeding Toolkit

Provides courts with considerations and guidance for adopting policies for remote and hybrid hearings.



Chapter 4:

STAFFING

The shift to hybrid hearings in 2020 posed three main challenges: 1) remote and hybrid proceedings increased the responsibility of court and judicial staff, 2) hearings took more time, and 3) specialized staff and/or skills were necessary.

Even now, courts still face these challenges and resources available for court information technology (IT) staff vary widely. Some courts have permanent, dedicated court IT staff, while others share staff resources with state and county governments. However, it is more common for judges, clerks, judicial assistants, and bailiffs to manage the technology on top of their court duties.

Knowledge of audio video solutions and videoconferencing platforms is critical to successful hybrid hearings. Today, most courts participating in the Hybrid Hearings Improvement Initiative shared that they are operating with the same equipment that was purchased during the emergency and would benefit from more investments in their hybrid equipment and dedicated support staff.

■ Case Study

COURT CHALLENGES

Lack of IT Support Staff
District Court
of Hamilton County
Syracuse, Kansas

34

**Formal Technology
Training and
Certification Program**
Judicial Support Specialist
Certification Program
*Kentucky Administrative
Office of the Courts*

35

SUMMARY

Resources

35

BY THE NUMBERS

2,500

POPULATION
SERVED

800

ANNUAL
FILING VOLUME

\$5,500

ANNUAL
TECHNOLOGY
BUDGET

(This includes one third earmarked for broadband and SaaS. The remaining balance is available to address hardware and software needs)

1

NUMBER OF STAFF
DEDICATED
TO TECHNOLOGY

Lack of IT Support Staff

District Court of Hamilton County

Syracuse, Kansas — With limited technology support staff, 95% of the courts' hybrid hearing equipment and capabilities are maintained by the local judge who allows in-person, remote, and hybrid hearings. Hybrid hearings are facilitated through a video setup in the courtroom consisting of five webcams. Additional courtroom technology includes a large TV, two small computers, multiple microphones, and numerous platforms to support videoconferencing, remote interpreting, digital court reporting, e-signatures, and online forms.

The judge, who has an IT background and the knowledge necessary to cost-effectively piece together disparate off-the-shelf commercial components into a working system, plays a key role in administering hybrid hearings in this jurisdiction.



Video setup consists of five webcams and four microphones. The courtroom gallery camera utilizes an AV cart adjacent to the bench, with a large TV and small PC. The remaining four cameras — one at each counsel table, one on the bench, and one in the witness box — are hooked to small PCs.

Formal Technology Training and Certification Program

Judicial Support Specialist Certification Program

Kentucky Administrative Office of the Courts — The Kentucky **Judicial Support Specialist (JSS) certification program** provides an opportunity for employees to develop and enhance their skills in facilitating remote court proceedings, preparing electronic orders, and reviewing caseload data for various court actions. The program curriculum includes three hours of instruction, two hours of shadowing and one hour of observation. Participants learn about topics related to e-Filing like the judge portal and quick submit, along with technology instruction on how to use Zoom and Microsoft Teams.

Employees who earn the certification and complete related training may be eligible for a 7% salary increase. Part of a larger state hybrid courtroom initiative, the Judicial Support Specialist program conducts monthly reporting and annual recertification for task validation and learning about changing technologies.

BY THE NUMBERS

800K

ANNUAL FILINGS
VOLUME

\$35M

ANNUAL
TECHNOLOGY
BUDGET

500+

NUMBER OF REMOTE
PROCEEDINGS PER
MONTH (2023)

158

CERTIFIED JSSs
STATEWIDE

RESOURCES



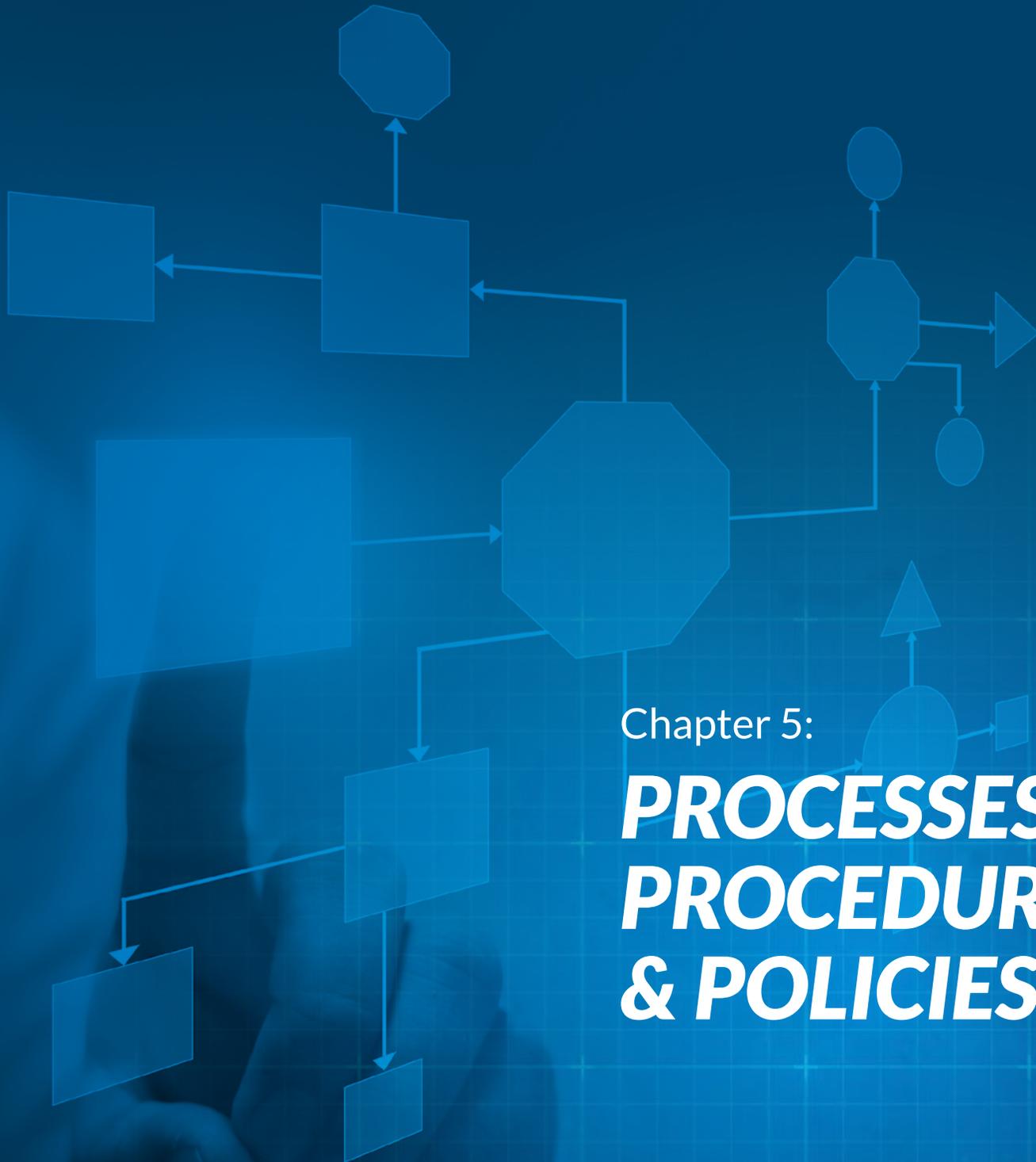
Recruitment, Selection, and Retention of IT Staff (2021),

CCJ/COSCA Court Management Committee and Joint Technology Committee report that provides guidance for recruiting, selecting, and retaining IT staff



Judicial Support Specialist (JSS) certification program

This six-hour program trains judicial support staff to facilitate remote proceedings, prepare electronic orders, and review caseload data for various court actions. Staff maintains statistics on a Sharepoint dashboard. Additional information can be obtained by contacting the Kentucky AOC.



Chapter 5:

PROCESSES PROCEDURES & POLICIES

Courts need to establish clear processes, procedures and policies for conducting successful remote proceedings.

By thoughtfully changing docket practices, providing a consistent court experience, improving operations, and prioritizing clear communication, courts can successfully use remote and hybrid hearings to improve performance, reduce costs, decrease errors, and help courts process cases more efficiently while also enhancing the court user experience both now and into the future.

■ Case Study

■ Pilot Site

■ Technical Assistance Site

COURT CHALLENGES

Prioritizing Clear Communications

Orleans Parish Court
New Orleans, Louisiana

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Changing Docketing Practices

Clark County District Court
Vancouver, Washington

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Providing a Consistent Court Experience

Ramsey County District Court,
2nd Judicial District
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Improving Operations to Support High-Volume, Hybrid Dockets

Phoenix Municipal Court
Phoenix, Arizona

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Prioritizing Clear Communications

Orleans Parish Court

New Orleans, Louisiana — This limited jurisdiction court hears cases related to adoption, abuse, neglect, child support, delinquency, juvenile traffic offenses, voluntary surrenders, custody transfers, and termination of parental rights.

Communication plays a pivotal role in the success of this remote system to ensure all parties are well informed and understand the rules and expectations. The court strives to maintain the same processes and decorum for both in-person and remote proceedings through persistent communication.

Changing Docketing Practices

Clark County District Court

Vancouver, Washington — During the pandemic, the Clark County District Court in Washington shifted to virtual hearings for all dockets. This transition was highly beneficial for both court participants and the court itself. As the pandemic waned, the court continued offering virtual dockets for specific types of hearings to maintain increased access to the court and operational efficiencies.

In 2021, the court determined that a more sustainable solution for virtual hearings was needed. To achieve this, the court and its information technology team collaborated with the National Center for State Courts to implement a hybrid hearing policy that featured a specific docket structure for virtual hearings. The policy also included a procedure for court participants and attorneys to file a motion with the court to request a change from a mandatory in-person docket to a virtual one.

For over a year, the Clark County District Court has successfully managed its dockets using a new system that allows the court to be flexible and efficient.

ORLEANS PARISH COURT BY THE NUMBERS

350K

POPULATION
SERVED

1,200

ANNUAL
FILING VOLUME

5

NUMBER
OF JUDGES

2

NUMBER OF STAFF
DEDICATED
TO TECHNOLOGY



Providing a Consistent Court Experience

Ramsey County District Court, 2nd District

St. Paul, Minnesota — The Ramsey County District Court is fully committed to its technology initiatives with seven staff positions dedicated to supporting judges and court staff. This team has adopted a comprehensive approach to hybrid hearings by providing the same experience for all users across all courtrooms. They also provide training and quick reference guides to assist users.

The courtroom experience includes:

- Three ceiling-mounted cameras
- Numerous wired and wireless microphones
- Assisted listening devices
- Numerous monitors for gallery viewing, judge's bench, and evidence display
- Centralized touch-panel controls
- Cisco and Zoom video conferencing platforms for hearings and language interpreters
- Digital court reporting system

Additionally, a Courtroom Technology Committee composed of judges, administrators, IT professionals, and business process specialists offers guidance and ongoing review of court technology needs.

BY THE NUMBERS

500K

POPULATION
SERVED

123,300

ANNUAL
FILING VOLUME

\$22M

ANNUAL
TECHNOLOGY
BUDGET

7

NUMBER OF STAFF
DEDICATED
TO TECHNOLOGY

SOLUTIONS FOR PROCESSES, PROCEDURES & POLICIES

- 1 Ceiling-mounted cameras
- 2 Microphones
- 3 Assisted listening device
- 4 Monitors
- 5 Touch-panel controls



3



2



1



Improving Operations to Support High-Volume, Hybrid Dockets

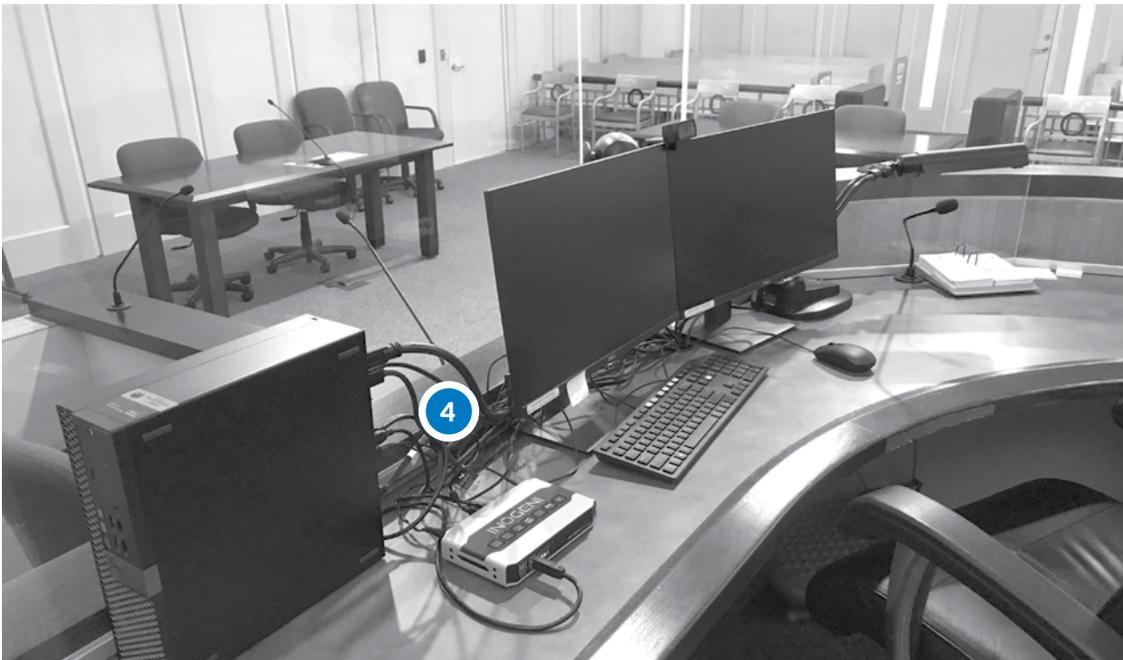
Phoenix Municipal Court

Phoenix, Arizona — Located in an urban population center, this high-volume court has a traffic docket that consists of both in-person and hybrid proceedings. At times, remote participants struggled to see and hear all participants in the courtroom and had difficulty presenting evidence using the court's WebEx system. The court also experienced operational challenges and sought ways to improve notice practices, workflow, and queuing for the cases to be heard.

To solve these challenges, the court implemented updated audio components, added cameras to their existing outlay, and improved video monitors to enhance the participant experience. The court also worked with NCSC staff to evaluate their caseload processes, including how to incorporate simultaneous interpreting, and assist with the configuration of their phones to improve party queuing and access.

SOLUTIONS FOR PROCESSES, PROCEDURES & POLICIES

- 1 Assisted listening device receiver
- 2 Pull-down projector screen for enhanced viewing of evidence
- 3 Improved video cameras
- 4 Windows desktop PC with audio interface



Proceedings Conduct⁴

Judges can take steps at the beginning of remote proceedings to ensure all parties understand the hybrid hearing process. This is particularly important when parties appear by phone and do not have visual cues. The following recommendations can help judges set expectations for conduct.

Technology Use and Accessibility

Mute function

Remind participants to mute their audio and instruct telephone participants on how to enable the mute function using controls such as *6 if necessary.

Participation

Let all participants know how they can indicate that they would like to be heard during the call. This may include raising a virtual hand, using a chat feature or some other indicator for participants using a telephone.

Name display

Explain how to edit participant display names and remind them of any naming conventions that need to be followed (e.g., “NAME, Plaintiff”).

Audio or bandwidth issues

Encourage participants to speak up if they were unable to hear any part of the proceedings due to audio or bandwidth issues. It is critically important that they are able to hear all the dialogue.

Interpreter and captioning services

Provide instructions on how participants can access interpretation and captioning services if required.

Hearing Norms and Conduct

Behavior and decorum

Emphasize to participants that they are still participating in a court proceeding and there are expectations for behavior and decorum.

Outline the order of the proceedings

Explain the structure and order of presentations (e.g., opening statements from the plaintiff first, followed by the defendant, etc.).

Use scripts

Consider developing scripts for judges to use.

⁴ Spulak, Grace. Remote Proceeding Toolkit, Version 2. Williamsburg, VA: National Center for State Courts, 2024

Policy Design & Development⁵

General Considerations

Courts may wish to consider the following factors when creating policies and procedures for remote or virtual proceedings. Adoption may be limited by state and federal law.

- How is video technology utilized? Is it used on a regular basis or only in specific cases?
- Is video utilized to enhance productivity and cost savings?
- Are there any specific technical requirements for remote appearances occurring outside of the jail or other court locations?
- Are there any defined technical standards for the quality of court equipment?
- Are there any guidelines for the public to use personal devices or public video kiosks/ access points?
- Will the court's website host hearings or educational videos?
- Is integration with county and state video equipment and resources needed?
- How broadly can virtual proceedings be accessed? Is there a limited audience or larger public audience?

Guiding Principles

When developing policies for remote proceedings, it is important to ensure these policies promote judicial principles including fairness and equality.

Equal access

Is the policy ensuring equal access for all participants, including those facing technological barriers or requiring language interpretation? Do accommodations exist for those requiring additional assistance?

Due process

Will the policy ensure equal participation in hearings regardless of how participants appear? Is the policy balanced to protect a user's right to access? How will tech challenges during hearings be addressed to avoid potential due process violations?

Transparency

Is the policy clear and available in multiple languages? How does it ensure public access, and how is the policy communicated to court users? Are any modifications needed for court forms, notices, websites, or other outreach?

Fairness

Does the policy adequately serve both in-person and remote court users?

Standardization

Does the policy ensure that court users will experience consistent processes across all jurisdictions? If variations exist, are the differences clearly explained?

Safety

Is personal information safeguarded? Are participants informed of and instructed on how to protect their personal information during live streaming? Does the policy consider trauma-informed principles for full participation?

⁵Spulak, Grace. Remote Proceeding Toolkit, Version 2. Williamsburg, VA: National Center for State Courts, 2024

Policy Design & Development

Future-Ready Courts

While developing policies that support today's court environment, it is also important to anticipate and prepare for future challenges. *Just Horizons: Charting the Future of the Courts* examines six vulnerabilities that courts should anticipate and prepare for. Three of these are particularly important as you consider how hybrid hearings will impact your court.



 [Download the resource](#)
[Just Horizons:](#)
[Charting the Future of the Courts](#)

VULNERABILITY

Data-Driven Decision Making

Courts sometimes face difficulties in fully utilizing data to make informed decisions. As a result, it can be challenging to determine which policies, practices, and decisions are effective and which ones require further attention.

Courts need to collect and analyze data to optimize their processes and ensure they are delivering justice effectively. Without the ability to share data-driven stories that demonstrate their effectiveness with policymakers, court users, the public, or the media, courts risk losing critical resources and overall public trust.

Increasing data literacy at all levels of the organization — court staff, judges, and administrators — will equip the court to ask the right questions, understand which data are relevant, and interpret data to gain meaningful insights to inform policy decisions.

VULNERABILITY

User-Centered & Inclusive Practices⁶

User-centered and inclusive design is crucial in meeting the needs of all individuals, particularly those who belong to marginalized groups. Courts must adopt a comprehensive approach that focuses on the needs and experiences of all who seek legal remedies, including those from various demographic and economic backgrounds and those with behavioral health and disability needs.

The following recommendations help to ensure that people can participate meaningfully and provide the court with better information:

- Participants should receive clear instructions and reminders in multiple formats and languages, such as verbal, written, and at different points during the process.
- When appropriate, give participants choices about how to appear (e.g. by video, with video off, telephonically, in person).

Transparency is important to courts, and remote hearings have allowed the public to participate in the judicial process in new ways. However, greater public access through virtual means has created new privacy implications as information becomes more widely available, and captured and reproduced on the internet.

⁶Spulak, Grace. Remote Proceeding Toolkit, Version 2. Williamsburg, VA: National Center for State Courts, 2024

VULNERABILITY

Understanding & Managing the Role of Private Entities in Court Work

The relationship between courts and private entities can be highly productive. Private innovators can contribute to the courts' functioning while the courts maintain their principles and autonomy. There are several trends that suggest the role of private entities in the court system will continue to grow in the coming decade. These trends include the increasing importance of technology firms in government and public functioning, as well as the expanding influence of private philanthropy and think tanks in driving specific reform and innovation agendas. To prepare for this future, courts must engage with the private sector in a way that preserves public values and clearly articulates their own agendas and principles.



FINAL THOUGHTS

While there is no consensus on what the most desirable version of hybrid hearings looks like, you now have several models to draw from for inspiration.

An ideal solution fulfills the unique needs of your court and jurisdiction. Variations in funding; technology; facilities; staffing; and processes, procedures, and policies will certainly impact the system you develop. And bringing together these pieces in a meaningful way will take time.

The Hybrid Hearings Improvement Initiative sought to support courts as they grapple with the changes associated with remote and hybrid hearings and develop best practices for courts across the country. We encourage you to contact us with your questions and updates as we continue to identify best practices and solutions as technology and support systems evolve.

COURT INNOVATION LAB FEATURES

- 1 Advanced conference room
- 2 Hoteling office
- 3 Huddle space
- 4 Showcase hoteling office
- 5 Community access point
- 6 Courtroom Technology Lab

The Court Innovation Lab is made possible through the support of NCSC and partners including Logitech, Televic, Zoom, and Marshall Furniture

NEW RESOURCES:

NCSC's Court Innovation Lab, Spring 2024

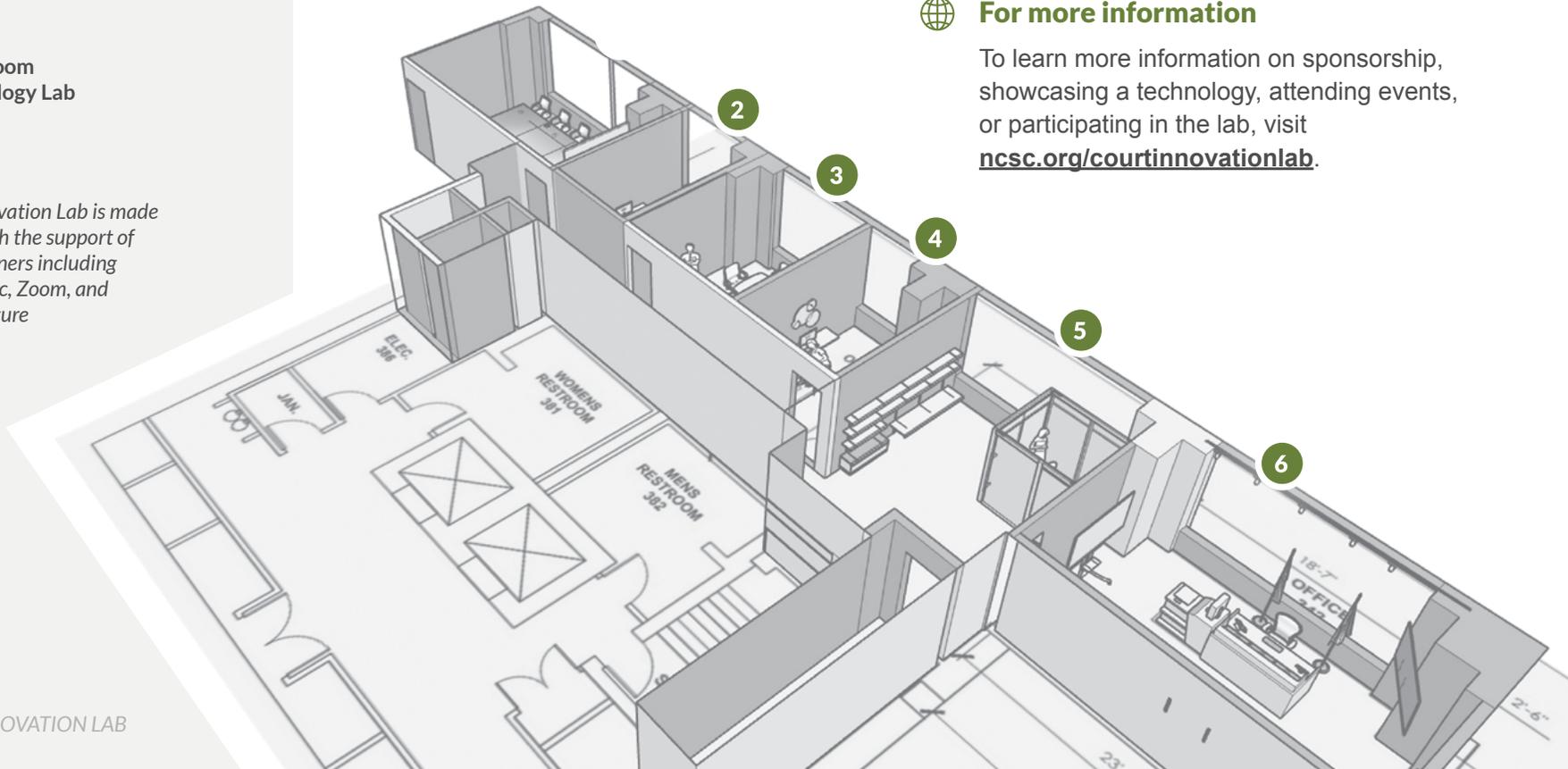
To continue the innovation and learning developed during the Hybrid Hearings Improvement Initiative and Court Space reDesign challenge, NCSC has established the Court Innovation Lab.

Located in Arlington, Va., near Washington, D.C., the Court Innovation Lab will be used by NCSC, courts, technology partners, and others to test, demonstrate, and showcase cutting-edge court and courtroom technology. It is a dynamic space featuring six distinct areas that can serve a wide range of courts and budgets. The lab's adaptable solutions are suitable for any setting and level of staffing in both domestic and international courts.



For more information

To learn more information on sponsorship, showcasing a technology, attending events, or participating in the lab, visit ncsc.org/courtinnovationlab.



Courtroom Technology Lab

The Courtroom Technology Lab seamlessly integrates traditional courtroom elements with advanced technological features. It is designed to support in-person, remote, and hybrid hearings and features essential components like a judge's bench, counsel tables, and an evidence stand.

Key equipment features:

- Three PTZ (Pan-Tilt-Zoom) cameras for flexible and high-quality video coverage needed to capture different angles during a proceeding
- An advanced Shure microphone ceiling array with an integrated loudspeaker that delivers crystal-clear audio to both in-person and remote participants
- Cart equipped with a Logitech Rally Bar for mobile video conferencing
- Networked video endpoints and wireless presentation gateways, along with versatile connections like HDMI and USB-C that easily integrate with multiple devices
- A ceiling-mounted document camera
- BYOD (Bring Your Own Device) conferencing system and production-style recorder
- Three 55" display monitors
- Assisted listening system for improved accessibility
- Intuitive touchscreen controls

Additionally, the lab's design includes Connectrac flooring for efficient cable management and an easily accessible data closet for smooth equipment swaps and upgrades.

Key facility features

Community Access Point

The Community Access Point showcases how a shared space can be simultaneously used by multiple self-represented litigants. It prominently includes a public access computer and technology and can accommodate interactive kiosks. A notable feature of this space is the private pod. This versatile unit is designed for confidential consultations, discreet conversations, or remote hearing attendance and ensures privacy and security during these interactions.

Huddle Space

A smaller version of the advanced conference room, the Huddle Space is specifically designed for small group meetings and hybrid hearings and can comfortably accommodate up to five people. It features a 43" flat panel display, a small Logitech Rally Bar for high-quality audio and video, and the Logitech Zoom One Touch for managing Zoom meetings. Additionally, an availability panel efficiently manages room bookings and occupancy.

Advanced Conference Room

Accommodating up to 10 people, this technology conference room is designed for versatility and efficiency and uses a Logitech Rally Bar and Logitech Site camera that produces high-quality audio and video for both in-room and remote participants.

Additional features include:

- Logitech Scribe whiteboard camera for interactive sessions and visual presentations
- Connectrac Flooring system for clean and efficient cable and power supply management
- Logitech One Touch controls to simplify Zoom meeting management
- 65" flat panel display
- An availability panel to aid in efficient room scheduling

Other Spaces and Features

The innovation lab also includes fully equipped hoteling offices and a kitchenette available for vendor and staff use. Additional technology enhancements include secure WiFi, a camera system for remote viewing, and a secure network closet and rack.



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