

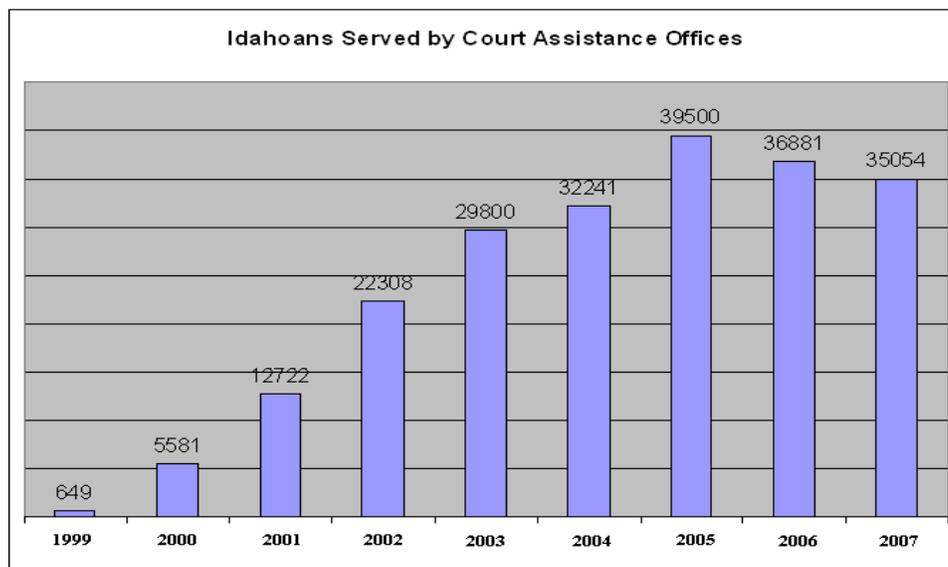


2007: Idaho Celebrates 10 Years of Court Assistance Services

Report to Governor Butch Otter and the Second Regular Session of the 59th Idaho Legislature

Idaho Celebrates Ten Years of Court Assistance Services

This year, Idaho courts will celebrate a ten year history of providing greater access to justice for Idahoans of limited or modest means who are unable to obtain legal representation to help them in court proceedings. An effort which began in 1998 with three pilot project offices has now expanded statewide with full service or limited services accessible through court assistance officers, or deputy court clerks, in all of Idaho's 44 counties. The number of Idahoans turning to the court for help in understanding how to seek an effective resolution of their legal disputes, reflects not only the success of this program, but also the great need for these types of services. The expression of public support and appreciation will drive greater efforts to provide improved services in underserved areas and to remove language and other barriers which may impede access to these services for many of our citizens.



Note: these figures do not include persons using the CAO Website or Interactive Court Forms

District-wide Models Tested to Improve the Outreach of Court Assistance Services in Less Populated Counties

Two Judicial Districts are now testing the use of attorneys as district-wide court assistance officers who circuit throughout the district providing services and workshops on a fixed schedule, and serve as a resource for deputy court clerks who provide limited services within their counties. At the end of two years, these pilot projects will be evaluated to see if this model for service is more effective in extending the outreach of full services throughout all counties of the district, including the less populated ones which are unable to provide full service offices. Using attorneys to provide court assistance services in each judicial district has been a goal endorsed by the Committee to Increase Access to the Courts. Currently, four of the seven judicial districts have a court assistance officer who is an attorney.

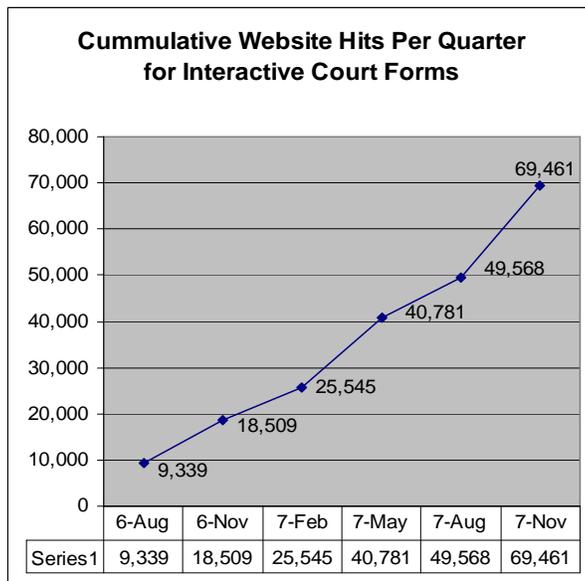
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Technology Providing Increased Access to Court Assistance

The number of Idahoans using technology to access court assistance services continues to increase. The statewide court assistance website was accessed 1,920,712 times by 213,839 different users between July 1, 2006 and June 30, 2007. The most frequently visited topics continue to be court forms, primarily in family law cases. The new Interactive Court Forms which use guided interviews to help complete court approved forms were visited over 50,000 times since those forms were made available on May 1, 2006. These numbers reflect a growing reliance on technology to access information from the courts.

In 2008, work will begin to improve the delivery of information through the statewide website by developing a more user-friendly site with reorganized content, and by developing multi-media tools which allow delivery of this information to the litigant in a more understandable format. Additional improvements under consideration include the use of live chat features where remote users in smaller counties can speak directly with a court assistance officer over the internet to get assistance in locating information or forms on the website. With Idaho's geographic diversity and vast differences in population and county resources, reliance upon these types of technologies to provide services to all Idahoans who need them is critical to the success of this program.



The Idaho Interactive Court Forms Project:

A Model of Success in Providing Greater Services Through the Use of Technology

The Idaho Interactive Court Forms Project has become a national model for the successful use of technology to provide court assistance services. This joint project between the court and Idaho Legal Aid Services began in January of 2005 and is nearing completion on December 31, 2007. Currently 27 guided interviews are used to assist self-represented litigants in completing 151 different court forms in cases involving divorce, custody, landlord/tenant disputes, change of name, domestic violence and small claims proceedings. At the conclusion of these interviews, all court forms the litigant will need are automatically assembled using the litigant's answers. The forms can then be printed or downloaded along with instructions for their use. This type of automated document assembly not only provides the correct forms the litigant will need, but also requires the forms be completed properly which avoids frustration on the part of the litigant, court staff, and judges.



EASY, STEP-BY-STEP
ACCESS TO JUSTICE



The Idaho project was the first to extensively use the A2J Authoring Software developed at Chicago Kent College of Law and the Center for Computer-Assisted Legal Instruction to create guided interviews using a friendly graphic interface to automatically assemble court forms. Because of the low cost and extreme flexibility of these tools, the Idaho project has generated national interest by other courts and legal service providers who would like to automate their court forms. Demonstrations of the Idaho Project have been presented at the Legal Services Corporation's (LSC) annual Technology Initiative Grant conferences, The Equal Justice Conference, the American Bar Association Technology "Techshow" Conference, and most recently at the 10th Court Technology Conference presented by the National Center for State Courts. Seven new LSC Technology Initiative Grants have been awarded to courts and legal service providers who are seeking to replicate Idaho's efforts.

In a limited 90 day evaluation which tracked the filing of only 16 of the more frequently accessed forms, almost 400 different litigants filed forms created through this project. At least one or more forms were filed in 32 of Idaho's 44 counties which confirms the potential of this technology to provide services to the more remote areas of the state.

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