



Judicial Branch of Arizona in Maricopa County

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Judicial Branch of Arizona in Maricopa County Wins Nine National Awards *Achievement awards are given for innovative programs*

PHOENIX (June 24, 2022) – Every year, the National Association of Counties (NACo) reviews thousands of applications from county organizations that work on innovative programs to better assist the populations they serve.

This year, the Judicial Branch of Arizona in Maricopa County was recognized with nine NACo Achievement Awards in various categories. The development of the award-winning programs not only improves court processes and efficiency but impacts a community forever changed by a health crisis.

The Juvenile Probation Department received two NACo Achievement Awards for the development of programs that directly benefit the youth they serve.

“These recognized projects are a direct result of the resiliency, innovation and service-driven mission that all of our men and women bring forth each and every day to improve the overall safety and wellness of our youth and community,” said Chief of Juvenile Probation Eric Meaux.

Sex Trafficking Screening and Identification Tool

Category: Children and Youth

The Sex Trafficking Screening Tool was developed to provide initial preliminary identification of youth who may be at risk for sex trafficking. In 2017, the Maricopa County Juvenile Probation Department joined the Maricopa County Child Sex Trafficking Collaborative and began work on creating a Sex Trafficking Screening Tool with Arizona State University’s Office of Sex Trafficking Intervention Research. By Dec. 1, 2017, the tool was launched and used to screen all juveniles coming into contact with the local juvenile justice system.

Virtual Life Skills and Internal Strengths Classes

Category: Children and Youth

Maricopa County Juvenile Probation Department’s Early Intervention Division demonstrated resiliency and innovation by developing and implementing two virtual strength classes for youth referred for alleged delinquency during the pandemic. In April 2021, the department launched two courses: Virtual Life Skills and Internal Strengths. The virtual courses focus on developing coping skills, self-reflection,

and educational tools for youth to handle adversity safely and successfully. The classes teach emotional intelligence and life skills through an accessible online platform.

This year, five NACo awards went to programs developed by the Maricopa County Adult Probation Department.

“We are very proud of the work of staff and leaders that is acknowledged in these awards,” said Chief Adult Probation Officer Michael Cimino. “They are a small example of the innovation and dedication staff throughout Adult Probation and the rest of the Branch use in approaching their work in service to the residents of Maricopa County.”

Community Reintegration Unit (CRU) Fileless Project

Category: *County Administration and Management*

The Maricopa County Adult Probation Department’s specialized Community Reintegration Unit provides supervision and transition planning to justice-involved individuals who are in custody. Most justice-involved individuals are in custody between 60 and 90 days; therefore, it is critical that the Community Reintegration Unit engages these individuals quickly to identify and alleviate barriers to a successful transition to the community. The existing assignment procedure, based on receipt of a physical file, increased the risk of lost files, created a workload burden for support staff and delayed or even prohibited the assignment of these individuals to a probation officer, which potentially resulted in fewer or no services while in custody. The unit developed a new assignment process that eliminated the need for physical files to assign the individual and begin supervision and transition planning. The new fileless system resulted in faster and more accurate assignments both in and out of custody.

Enhancing Staff Access to Data

Category: *County Administration and Management*

To make data more accessible for staff and leadership, the Maricopa County Adult Probation Department implemented an automated process to deliver reports to department leadership and program managers. In addition to the automated report subscription service made available to staff, staff are also able to run reports on demand. These reports allow Adult Probation leadership to access information in a timely manner when needed to help manage programs, workload and assess data quality.

Virtual Delivery of Cognitive Behavioral Interventions

Category: *Information Technology*

The Maricopa County Adult Probation Department supervises more than 46,000 justice-involved individuals in the community. Part of the department’s mission includes “providing research-based prevention and intervention services.” Thinking for a Change and Decision Points are two evidence-based cognitive behavioral interventions designed for justice-involved individuals. Both programs are offered through Adult Probation, the Maricopa County Sheriff’s Office, and community partners including Terros Behavioral Health and La Frontera – Empact. In March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated a sudden and drastic change in how the Adult Probation engaged individuals under its supervision, including how programs were delivered. Understanding the stress the pandemic created on all individuals, let alone those who were still building prosocial coping mechanisms, program staff immediately identified the need to develop an alternative to the in-person delivery of these classes to the population the department serves. Over 40 Thinking for a Change classes have been delivered online with more than 400 graduates. The resulting virtual delivery of both classes was one of the first of its kind nationally.

Centralized Production

Category: Information Technology

More than 46,000 justice-involved individuals are under the supervision of the Maricopa County Adult Probation Department. The 39 employees who comprise the supportive services units provide critical administrative support to the department's more than 1,100 employees. Support staff are often the first person justice-involved individuals encounter at local probation offices. They are asked to complete a number of administrative tasks such as enter restitution payments, update the department's case management system, transfer cases to other offices, and maintain performance measures for the unit which they serve. Each probation office houses a team of support staff that provide these services. In 2020, support staff supervisors identified an opportunity to better distribute the work assigned to support staff. Through collaboration between multiple divisions and teams across the department, a centralized workflow process was created. Since going operational in August 2021, the adoption of this new process has reduced disparities in workload distribution, shortened turnaround times for work items and improved overall consistency.

Presentence Officer Virtual Training Program

Category: Personnel Management, Employment and Training

The Presentence Investigations Division of the Maricopa County Adult Probation Department has shown flexibility and resilience throughout the unprecedented challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. Presentence Investigations Division personnel persevered through dramatic staffing fluctuations, transitioned to a largely remote working environment, and assisted community supervision staff by assuming court reporting duties for thousands of reports that combine new offenses with probation violation offenses. During this period of change, an opportunity was highlighted to transition the new presentence investigation officer training program from a reliance on in-person training to a virtual platform. The virtual training program eliminated inefficiencies such as redundant printed instructional materials and duplication of trainer efforts in favor of an online central repository of information and virtual trainings that provided new staff with access to teams of multiple experienced trainers, officers and supervisors. The measurable benefits realized by the virtual training program demonstrate the impact of organizational flexibility and stand as an example of how leveraging technology can meet the challenges of a modern workplace changed by the pandemic. Buoyed by the response to the flexibility this training offered presentence investigations staff, this training process will remain in place even as staff return to the office.

The Civil Department at the Judicial Branch of Arizona also received a recognition for their development of the Automated Arbitrator Feed Project.

"The Civil Department is honored that the Automated Arbitrator Feed project received a NACo Achievement Award. We would like to give a special thank you to the court's Business Services Department, our frontline staff for their involvement and feedback, and the State Bar for providing the data to make this successful," said Civil Department Administrator Luke Emerson. "We are proud that this project was able to increase the number of attorneys being appointed as arbitrators, which will significantly reduce the caseloads of those attorneys who have been appointed in the past. Additionally, this project improved the justice system in Maricopa County, as staff can process more cases by having more eligible arbitrators to appoint. This increases access to justice, as cases are being processed more expeditiously and litigants will have their cases adjudicated timelier. Finally, this project will reduce the cost and resources needed to process arbitration cases in Maricopa County since returned mail and the research that follows are projected to be reduced as the information utilized by the court is more accurate."

Superior Court of Arizona in Maricopa County – Automated Arbitrator Feed Project

Category: *County Administration and Management*

The Superior Court of Arizona in Maricopa County is responsible for appointing non-judge attorney arbitrators to certain Civil cases under the Arizona Rules of Civil Procedure. Between July 2020 and June 2021, more than 14,000 cases went through compulsory arbitration in Maricopa County, conducted by these arbitrators. The Civil Department of the Superior Court historically appointed arbitrators manually to each case. This process presented challenges, including ensuring all eligible attorneys are appointed, non-eligible attorneys are not appointed, attorney address information is updated, and information is updated timely to reduce various delays. Before the project, the Civil Department only appointed approximately one-third of eligible attorneys, resulting in cases being disproportionately assigned to fewer attorneys and the arbitration process taking longer. Working with the State Bar in 2021, the Superior Court developed and implemented a data feed from the State Bar to the Superior Court for eligible attorney information for arbitrations. This increased the number of attorneys being appointed as arbitrator by three times, from approximately 3,000 attorneys to approximately 9,000 attorneys. Additionally, the accuracy of attorney information in the Court's case management system was improved. This resulted in a decrease of staff time to research attorney information, an increase in the number of cases assigned to arbitrations in a period, and a decrease in returned mail due to incorrect attorney addresses.

In response to the pandemic, the Criminal Department at the Judicial Branch of Arizona saw the need to develop a new way for criminal court proceedings to be held more efficiently and to keep everyone safe during a health crisis.

"The pandemic forced us to respond to problems we have never encountered before as a judicial and law enforcement community," said Deputy Criminal Administrator Chris Candelaria. "We overcame setbacks, celebrated the small victories and stayed focused on the mission: providing access to justice while striving to keep staff, defendants and the public safe. These two programs are worthy of recognition because multiple stakeholders came together to solve a series of problems. The Maricopa County Sheriff's Office, Court Technology Services and the Court worked tirelessly to take some big ideas and turn them into a successful reality."

Jail Tablet Hearing and SMART Cart Program

Category: *Criminal Justice and Public Safety*

The Jail Tablet Hearing and SMART Cart Program is a collaborative effort between the Maricopa County Sheriff's Office, Court Technology Services and the Criminal Department of the Superior Court of Arizona in Maricopa County. SMART stands for Sentencing via Mobile Access Remote Technology. This innovative program enables a variety of Criminal Court hearings to be held virtually through an interactive audiovisual system for eligible in-custody defendants housed at one of the six Maricopa County jail facilities. Created in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the goal of Jail Tablets and SMART Carts is to provide court access to a specific population of defendants who are those identified as "Do Not Transport" due to quarantine or medical restrictions. The mechanics include providing the in-custody defendant with a quiet, private location in the jail with access to a tablet or SMART cart equipped with videoconferencing software. The Jail Tablet Hearing initiative piloted in July 2020 with three Judicial Officers and is now in use across the entire Criminal Department. The program expanded in March 2021 to include sentencings. As of February 2022, 4,884 Jail Tablet Hearings and 705 SMART Cart sentencings have been conducted by the Criminal Department.

For more information visit: [NACo Awards Program Search](#).

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The Judicial Branch of Arizona in Maricopa County is comprised of Superior Court, Adult Probation and Juvenile Probation, which includes juvenile detention. The Judicial Branch in Maricopa County is the fourth largest trial court system in the nation and, along with its 3,200 employees, is dedicated to providing a safe, fair and impartial forum for resolving disputes, enhancing access to services, and providing innovative, evidence-based practices that improve the safety of the community and ensure the public's trust and confidence in the Judicial Branch. For more information, visit www.superiorcourt.maricopa.gov.