

Hamilton County & Judicial Innovation Fellowship Statement of Work

Summary

The Hamilton County General Sessions Court and the county government want to assess what data their courts have, where the data lives, what format the data is in, and to understand collection and sharing practices. The JIF Fellow will audit and improve how courts and information technology departments share data to understand court patron experiences across government services, the criminal justice system, and court debt obligations in an effort to break cycles of debt, homelessness, and criminal recidivism. By the end of the fellowship, Hamilton County will have actionable recommendations to build a modern data system, improving the county's and court's ability to provide greater insight into the experiences, challenges, opportunities, and disparities faced by county residents within the legal system.

Problem Statement

There is an assumption in Hamilton County that economically vulnerable residents also have contact with the criminal court system and face debt obligations. However, there are no current data efforts to better understand this relationship. The data systems currently used in the county are older and not user-friendly, making data access and analysis difficult, if not impossible. The data they do have does not use a unique identifier. This keeps court, county, and community leaders from understanding a person's legal problems and government contact holistically, curtailing the ability to provide meaningful services.

Project Tasks

Phase 1: The fellow will begin by researching the county court's data systems and data culture.

With the help of county partners, the fellow will interview municipal court representatives (administrators, clerks, judges, etc.), community partners, and Hamilton County residents impacted by the justice and benefits systems to understand existing data systems, data collection and analysis practices, government data culture, data sharing, and potential areas for technical and process improvement and coordination. When interviewing residents and community organizations, the fellow will also learn about relevant experiences with the courts and data, attitudes toward the courts and data gathering, and key court data needed to help them better serve the community. This research will include legal and ethical privacy considerations created by the creation, storage, and sharing of the data. It will also include potential legal, technical, and other limitations that have previously hindered a more integrated data system.

The fellow will analyze and map the existing data systems across the Hamilton County General Sessions Criminal Court, General Sessions Civil Court, State Criminal Court, State Circuit Court (civil), State

Juvenile Court, and local municipal courts and clerks. This will include how those courts collect, store, analyze, and share data across various IT departments, clerks' offices, and court data management systems.

The fellow will research best practices and potential models used by other courts, the public sector, and/or the private sector, to inform potential solutions for Hamilton County. This research will include looking at similar courts (by size, geography, IT infrastructure, etc.) implementing court data modernization strategies, analytics, and public access/transparency tools.

Phase 2: The fellow will synthesize their research and begin formulating, sharing, and iterating potential recommendations.

Based on Phase I's research, the fellow will begin to formulate potential technical and process (and, where the fellow's skills allow, legal/policy) solutions to be adopted by the county.

The fellow will provide ongoing feedback opportunities to clerks, technology departments, and other project partners. Feedback will be used to iterate and refine potential solutions.

Phase 3: Document research and recommendations for future work and implementation. Provide handoff training to permanent court staff.

The fellow will document their research, findings, and recommendations. This includes a flowchart mapping relevant Hamilton County databases and data sharing, insights into how stakeholders—both within and outside government systems—engage with criminal and civil court systems, and how the data posture in those systems can be improved. The fellow will also indicate other areas of needed research they uncovered but were not able to complete during their contract.

The fellow will present their work throughout the fellowship to Hamilton County staff and project partners. Topics may include their research and potential changes to court policies, practices, and technology aimed at improving data collection and analysis, as well as how best to use the fellow's work after the fellowship concludes.

Outputs

- A flowchart mapping relevant Hamilton County court databases and data sharing channels.
- A report summarizing the fellow's research, including local interviews, case studies of other organizations and courts, and recommendations to improve the technology and processes that build more efficient and collaborative data technology systems that serve legal system stakeholders, elected leaders and policymakers, government agencies, non-profits, and Hamilton County residents.
- The fellow, along with the county mayor's office and general sessions court, will present their research to local and state leaders about their findings and recommendations.

Resources

[This section is for resources related to this work that can help get the fellow up to speed quickly. A title and a hyperlink is sufficient.]

- [Stout C/B Housing Analysis](#)
- [Pew Research \(forthcoming\)](#)
- [NCSC eFile Report \(forthcoming\)](#)

Partners and Stakeholders

Below are a list of stakeholders and partners the fellow will interact with during the project. The Partner Court will help the Fellow understand who in each agency to speak with, and what level of engagement is needed.

Municipal Partners and Courts

- HC General Sessions, Circuit, Juvenile, and Criminal Courts
- HC Mayor's Office and ECD Office
- City of Chattanooga Mayor's Office
- City Clerk
- Soddy Daisy, East Ridge, Collegedale, Red Bank, Lookout Mountain, Signal Mountain, and City of Chattanooga Courts*

Community Partners

- Legal Aid of East Tennessee
- Community Foundation of Greater Chattanooga
- Habitat for Humanity
- Social service agencies
- Eviction Diversion Initiative / Eviction Prevention Initiative staff and leadership
- Chattanooga Community Bail Fund

Research and IT Partners

- Pew Charitable Trusts, Julia
- Legal Services Corporation, Holly Stevens
- National Center for State Courts
- STOUT Analytics
- Sycamore Institute

Resident Organizing and Community Engagement Organizations

- Eviction Prevention Initiative Tenant Advisory - Leadership group of EPI served households (3 households)
- Building Stable Lives Participants
- Mental Health Court and Drug Recovery Court staff and graduates* (County General Services or staff and resident graduates)

Elected Officials

- County Commission
- City of Chattanooga
- Municipal councils and commissions in the county