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## **Second Generation Electronic Filing Specifications (2GEFS)**

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The California Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) initiated the Second Generation Electronic Filing Specifications (2GEFS) project to develop specifications for statewide electronic court filing. The specifications allow any California court to receive and respond to electronic filings from any compliant provider of e-filing services through the use of XML technology. Recently, the AOC completed validation testing of the specifications.

The completion of validation testing was the culmination of two years of work by court staff, electronic filing and case management system vendors, consultants, and the California AOC. These specifications, based on lessons learned from Legal XML Court Filing 1.0, were designed using XML schema to provide courts with a standardized way to implement electronic filing.

### **Four Core Specifications**

The 2GEFSs are composed of four core specifications to facilitate electronic filing in California. Using these specifications, courts will be able to more easily overcome the obstacles often presented by complex technology environments, as the standardized XML schema framework will allow them to pass information more accurately and reliably.

- 1. Court filing** defines an electronic envelope for transporting documents and case data to and from court systems (Filings and Confirmations).
- 2. Court policy** defines how details about individual courts or their divisions can be expressed in ways that computer programs can understand without human intervention.
- 3. Request/response** defines how information and documents can be queried and retrieved from court databases.

4. **CMS API** is an application program interface (API) for standardizing the means for getting data and documents into and out of court case management systems.

### **Benefits**

The specifications were built to encourage the implementation of electronic filing in California's courts. Because the specifications allow vendors to reuse software instead of designing custom solutions for each implementation, the courts will benefit from the 2GEFS through lower implementation costs and faster project timelines. Courts should also expect to see greater success from their electronic filing systems

For vendors, 2GEFS means better use of resources by reusing software from court to court and creating a standardized interface for users across the state. This means better customer service for the 58 superior courts that process around 8 million files annually and for the more than 36 million residents of California. Vendors and courts also now have a guideline for implementing electronic filing that is proven and endorsed by the California Administrative Office of the Courts.

### **Resources Required**

The specifications were developed over two years in two phases at relatively minor cost to the AOC. The first phase included the development of the draft specifications, the second phase involved validation testing of the specifications in conjunction with the Superior Court of Sacramento County's implementation of an electronic filing system for unlawful detainer cases. Project resources for the first phase included:

- Two consultants retained by the AOC
- One part-time staff person
- Vendors of electronic filing and case management system software volunteered time and resources to collaborate on defining the requirements and specifications
- A group of court specialists reviewed the draft specifications to ensure that they met the business needs of the courts

Conducting the validation testing involved:

- An AOC staff member and consultant
- Staff of the Superior Court of Sacramento County
- Electronic filing vendors

Using 2GEFS court filing and court policy specifications, the court was able to reuse software it had developed for its small claims e-filing system and apply it for unlawful detainer cases. Because of the 2GEFS, the Sacramento court will be able to use the same software components again for other types of filing.

#### **Issues to Consider**

Throughout the project, the team identified important lessons learned for all parties involved. These lessons include what essential resources are required, where to allot more time than may be expected, how to approach electronic filing system implementation, and who needs to be involved when.

- **Remain Focused.** When initiating an electronic filing project, create achievable milestones to focus the project. Identify a case type for which the court will accept electronic filings and work from there. Undoubtedly, different policy issues will arise through the course of different projects. Project managers should track such issues, resolving those that are on the critical path for the project and identifying those policy issues that can be pushed to future phases. This helps keep the project scope manageable as implementation moves forward.
- **Define Return on Investment.** When initiating and conducting a court filing project, project managers must identify the expected return on investment in the courts in California, the desired return on investment is generally the ability to free up staff time that can be devoted to other projects. Furthermore, electronic filing is seen as a public service and a way to make the courts more accessible to the public and justice partners. Define return on investment to help focus the project's direction and priorities.
- **Focus on Business Over Technology.** Throughout the Sacramento 2GEFS project, the business and policy elements

consistently required more time and resource investment than did the development of the technology. It is important to allocate sufficient time and resources to identify and potentially resolve business issues. Information such as filing fee tables and relevant filing types must be organized and documented for each case management system and each case category. Preparing this information in advance will save the project significant time during software implementation.

- **Research Applicable Court Rules and Law.** Most jurisdictions have policies and statutes that are impacted by electronic filing either directly or indirectly. These statutes range from rules of court on electronic filing and service of process to how a document can be file stamped and endorsed in an electronic environment. It is important to identify and understand these policies and statutes when implementing an electronic filing system.
- **Rethink Business Processes.** An electronic filing project is an opportunity to reexamine court business processes to determine if they make sense in an electronic environment or if there are ways to make these processes more efficient by using technology. One good example is identifying where software can validate information on an electronic filing to expedite the clerk's review of incoming information and documents.
- **Cooperate and Collaborate.** One of the key successes of the 2GEFS project was the willingness of multiple service providers and courts to work together to develop the specifications. Service providers as much as courts are looking to administrative bodies such as the AOC to simplify the electronic filing implementation process. Cooperation among stakeholders leads to an agreed model of electronic filing and specifications that resolve key policy issues and define roles and responsibilities for the all parties involved.

#### **What's Next in California**

Now that the specifications have been developed and tested, the California AOC is developing a compliant architecture for electronic filing for use statewide. This architecture will reduce the technological hurdles and streamline the costs and steps needed for successful electronic filing.

Courts in California will examine the specifications when implementing electronic filing. Implementations in the Superior Courts of Contra Costa and San Mateo Counties in addition to the first implementation in the Sacramento project are under way. The AOC encourages courts that are considering electronic filing solutions to pursue local implementations. The specifications and the statewide electronic filing architecture have been designed to support smooth transitions for courts with compliant local implementations.

A number of additional business issues have been identified through testing and in preparation for the implementation of a statewide electronic filing architecture. These issues include establishing and maintaining a statewide registry for court policy files, creating a methodology for developing and maintaining the court policy files, and defining roles and responsibilities for electronic filing services providers, the electronic filing manager, and the courts. The AOC will now begin to work with court subject experts to resolve these issues to further enhance the specifications.

**Where to Find the Specifications**

The specifications are now published on the California Courts Web site at <http://www.courtinfo.ca.gov/programs/efiling/>.

**Contact Information**

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