

# Virtual Court: Implementation Guide

Virtual appearances can be helpful for individuals who have trouble getting to the courthouse, including people with transportation barriers, childcare obligations, and disabilities. Use this implementation guide to develop virtual court policies and procedures for your jurisdiction.

- 1 Establish a team of stakeholders.** Identify and include all relevant stakeholders, such as clerks of court, judges, prosecutors, and defenders.
- 2 Determine what hearings can be held virtually.** Consult existing statutes and court policies to determine any existing limits on virtual court and ensure you are following established procedures. Then, have your team consider the benefits and challenges of conducting different types of virtual hearings, including careful planning for how you will protect the rights of the accused. Some stakeholders might be uncomfortable holding more complex hearings virtually.

## EXAMPLE

A 2020 Lab survey found that most court actors in North Carolina supported holding first appearances virtually, but were divided about holding probation violation hearings virtually.

- 3 Decide when and where virtual court will take place.** Will virtual hearings only be allowed in special circumstances, or will you hold regular sessions of fully virtual dockets? Outline a schedule showing which calendars will be virtual.
- 4 Get necessary equipment.** Start by making sure your courthouse has a strong, reliable internet connection. Then, purchase necessary equipment to outfit courtrooms like computers, cameras, and microphones.
- 5 Choose a virtual platform.** If your jurisdiction does not already have an approved platform to host virtual meetings, choose a platform that is secure and reliable while being free and simple for court-users. Consider what features you'll need when making your choice. For example, the ability to make private breakout rooms can be helpful so people can speak with their attorneys confidentially during virtual hearings.
- 6 Test and train.** Before you start scheduling virtual hearings, make sure you have tested your equipment multiple times. Train relevant people on the new procedures and teach them how to troubleshoot common technical issues.
- 7 Codify the policy.** Once you have finalized your policies and procedures, codify the rules for virtual court in your local policies.
- 8 Notify the public and consider accessibility.** Make sure you have a system to notify individuals that their hearing will be held virtually. Instructions for logging on to virtual hearings need to be widely available. Consider how you'll make virtual hearings accessible for people who might not have reliable internet or home computers.

## EXAMPLE

You can read about options to make virtual court more accessible [here](#).

- 9 Review and readjust if needed.** Your team should get together periodically to make sure virtual court is running fairly and efficiently. Feedback from court users and stakeholders can point to areas for improvement. Data collection on metrics like failure to appear in virtual court versus in-person court can help you determine the policy's impact.