

ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE OF
NINETEENTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT
CIRCUIT COURT OF LAKE COUNTY



TO: Audrey Nixon, Chair, Law & Judicial Committee
Susan Gravenhorst, Vice Chair
Carol Calabresa, Member
Pat Carey, Member
Mary Cunningham, Member
Michelle Feldman, Member
Pamela Newton, Member

FROM: Bob Zastany & Members of SMAART Team Z

DATE: January 2, 2009

RE: Performance Report – The Integration of Strategic Planning, Trial
Court Performance Standards and CourTools©

C: Circuit Judges
County Board Members
Barry Burton

The attached report and concept map reflect the continuing evolvement of the Court's application of strategic planning and performance measurement. The report provides the mission statement of the court and presents a brief history of this effort. The information collected from the strategies that are supported by the SMAART Performance Program is critical to both the Circuit Judges and to our management team in that it gives us the ability to make continuous adjustments to various programs and services affected. This in turn allows us to remain efficient, effective and responsive to the community we serve.

I encourage each of you to take some of your valuable time to review this brief report. If you would like a formal presentation, or would prefer to have staff available to address questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

CIRCUIT COURT OF LAKE COUNTY
THE INTEGRATION OF STRATEGIC PLANNING, TRIAL COURT PERFORMANCE STANDARDS AND COURTOOLS©

MISSION STATEMENT:

The mission of the Circuit Court of Lake County is to serve the public. Those who work in the court system accomplish this mission by striving to achieve the highest standards of excellence in the areas of Access to Justice; Expedition and Timeliness; Equality, Fairness, and Integrity; Independence and Accountability; and Public Trust and Confidence.

BACKGROUND:

In the fall of 1999, the Chief Judge of the Circuit Court of Lake County convened a Strategic Planning Committee composed of judges and staff members. The committee divided its work into three stages: (1) review the goals of the original plan to determine if they continue to reflect the core values of the court; (2) meet with personnel and court partners to gather suggestions and observations about the functioning of the court on all levels; and (3) identify tasks in the original plan that had been accomplished, reaffirm strategies that needed continued work and formulate tasks and strategies to respond to new challenges and priorities.¹

It was during the first stage of its work where the committee compared the original plan to the Trial Court Performance Standards which are a set of standards developed by the Commission on Trial Court Performance Standards, a project of the National Center for State Courts and the Bureau of Justice Assistance. Impressed with the clarity and logic of the standards, the committee voted to adopt the Trial Court Performance Standards as the organizing principles of the new Strategic Plan of the Circuit Court of Lake County.² These standards were also incorporated into the court's mission statement.

Upon its release in the year 2000, the revised Strategic Plan contained several strategies that would be supported by the court's SMAART Program. The acronym SMAART stands for: **S**pecific (*outcome-based goals/standards/targets of achievement*); **M**asurable (*honest measures – not abstract or subjective*); **A**ggressive yet **A**chievable (*push the envelope but be realistic*); **R**elevant (directly relevant to the challenge at hand – goals, standards, targets), **T**ime-sensitive (*closure – target dates and not always calendar/budget year based*)³ and defines our performance measurement program. The SMAART Program was designed to "...increase the insight of our operations and make the best judgment about the effectiveness of Court programs, staff functions and how we allocate funding."⁴

¹ Nineteenth Judicial Circuit, **Strategic Plan**, 2000, page i.

² **Ibid.**

³ Nineteenth Judicial Circuit, **SMAART, A Guide for Performance Measurement**, 2004, page 2.

⁴ **Ibid.**

In 2005, the National Center for State Courts developed CourTools©, a set of ten indicators that allows courts to measure their performance in a meaningful and manageable manner. By drawing on the insights of the Trial Court Performance Standards as well as contemporary management literature, the measures are shaped by three interrelated criteria: (1) fundamental court values; (2) balanced perspective on the work of the court; and (3) feasibility and sustainability.⁵

CURRENT PRACTICES:

Since the introduction of CourTools©, the Circuit Court of Lake County has implemented Measure 1: Access and Fairness; Measure 2: Clearance Rates; Measure 3: Time to Disposition; Measure 4: Age of Active Pending Caseload; Measure 5: Trial Date Certainty; Measure 8: Effective Use of Jurors; and Measure 9: Court Employee Satisfaction, on a continual basis. Furthermore, Measures, 2, 8 and 9 have been fully integrated into the court's SMAART programming and process.

The Circuit Court of Lake County has produced several reports over the past few years showcasing the results of the implemented CourTools© Measures. Examples of these past reports include: Access and Fairness Survey Results (Measure 1); Employee Survey Results (Measure 9); and our Executive Level Measures for years 2007 and 2008 (Measures 2 and 8).

Measures 2, 3, 4 and 5 were recently applied as part of an in-depth review of the court's felony case processing, policy and procedures. As a result of that review and through application of the CourTools© Measures, deficiencies within CRIMS management reports were identified and corrected. These corrections subsequently enabled the court to report the data in a more meaningful manner and will allow the court to more accurately compare its findings to other courts nationwide. In addition, application of the Measures through use of the templates offered through the CourTools© website resulted in a collaborative exchange with the National Center and its creator of the templates. This collaboration ultimately enhanced several of the templates for greater ease in use. This exchange of information and ideas is one of many that are contained within the CourTools© on-line community, *Community in Practice*. Since its inception, the Circuit Court of Lake County has been an active participant with the Community in Practice forum and routinely contributes to the discussion of performance measurement.

⁵ National Center for State Courts, **CourTools: A Court Performance Framework**, 2005, page 4.

**Concept Mapping of:
The Integration of Strategic Planning,
Trial Court Performance Standards
and CourTools®**

