

Strategic Plan

Nineteenth Judicial Circuit
Circuit Court of Lake County, Illinois





**STRATEGIC PLAN
OF
THE NINETEENTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT
CIRCUIT COURT OF LAKE COUNTY, ILLINOIS**

DATED THIS 1ST DAY OF JANUARY, 2009

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MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF JUDGE

JAMES K. BOORAS

In many nations around the globe, impartial, prompt and effective justice is only a dream. For us, here, it is a living, evolving part of our society, centered in our courts. We have so much more to celebrate than do those in societies that are only now beginning the long struggle to establish democratic institutions. We have so much more to celebrate. Nevertheless, for me, justice is something that I do not take for granted. I will never take it for granted. My life experience has taught me that justice is what the fight is all about, for justice is the lynchpin of those freedoms we hold most dear.

In the Nineteenth Judicial Circuit, thousands of people enter our courthouses every day. They come as lawyers and litigants, as jurors and witnesses, as friends, family and curious observers. They seek justice on issues that run the gamut of human experiences: family disputes, criminal matters, civil rights, commercial and financial disagreements. The viability of our justice system, the strength of each individual's willingness to accept and obey our orders, depends on those who use our courts, and what they think about how "we" do our work. Moreover, what they think depends on the totality of what they observe and experience in our courts. Those of us who serve must remember that "we" are the stewards of the third branch of government. We are entrusted by the public to make our system better for future generations, for it (the judicial system) will be here long after our children's children pass on. We must remain vigilant in our quest to consistently seek ways to further improve the administration of justice here in Lake County.

The vision statement and mission statement for our court system speak very specifically to the importance of maintaining an independent Judiciary as well as earning the respect and confidence of an informed citizenry of Lake County. Obviously, these fundamentals are not unique to the many courts across our great State and in fact arguably could be viewed as the cornerstone of any judicial system.

Our current Strategic Plan embraces the Trial Court Performance Standards published by the National Center for State Courts (July 1990). These standards group the fundamental responsibilities or purposes of our trial court into five elements: 1) Access to Justice, 2) Expedition and Timeliness, 3) Equality, Fairness and Integrity, 4) Independence and Accountability, 5) Public Trust and Confidence. These standards will continue to serve as the foundation for our future activities, both in the short-term and in the long-term.

The Judiciary, in general terms and as well as here in Lake County, must assert and maintain its distinctiveness as a separate branch of government. Within the organizational structure of the judicial branch of government, we must establish our

legal and organizational boundaries, monitor and control our operations, and account publicly for our performance. Independence and accountability permit government by law, access to justice and timely resolution of disputes with equality, fairness and integrity. They engender public trust and confidence. We must both control our proper functions and demonstrate respect for our co-equal partners in government.

However, it may be seen in philosophical or historical terms, a judicial system is a service function of a society or a government. Essentially courts are created to serve basic human needs and we cannot serve our high purpose on sentiment, tradition or folklore. When we think of the Judiciary, we tend to focus on the judges that serve the public. Judges, of course, are one cornerstone of the judicial system. However, we cannot do our work without the necessary staff that is highly trained and motivated to provide matchless service to the courts and to the citizens of Lake County. Probation staff, juvenile counselors, court reporters, court clerks, security personnel and scores of other tremendously talented individuals perform essential functions in the judicial process. I look forward to and am proud to be working with each and every one of them.

Oftentimes, people measure the quality of justice by opinions and decisions that are given by the judiciary and verdicts that are reached by juries. The view of the citizenry on the quality of justice provided in Lake County is overwhelmingly positive, and that is primarily due to the responsiveness and commitment that is executed daily by the judges and staff of the Nineteenth Circuit. In addition, I believe that the quality of the decisions reached each day by our judges is unsurpassed by any others in the State. However, over the past few years, there has been concern about the lack of growth in resources, specifically in the area of judges, court reporters, probation officers and courtrooms. Complicating the issue is also the fact that our judges are handling burgeoning caseloads, some that require more hearing time than court calls permit. This is especially true in our high volume courts. I can assure you, however, that accountability shall not be compromised, and that the court will continue to meet the needs of the people it serves. I believe that the Nineteenth Judicial Circuit is recognized as one of the most progressive court systems nationwide, and we will continue to work to uphold its respectable reputation.

James K. Booras, Chief Judge

INTRODUCTION

The Strategic Plan of the Circuit Court of Lake County is a vision of the judicial system that states goals and objectives based on values important to the effective administration of justice in our community. The plan focuses the use of energy and resources to perpetuate both the values of the system and its continued improvement process. The plan will guide the judges and court staff in working to fulfill our mission. This plan builds upon the successful execution of the Circuit's first two Strategic Plans as well as earlier initiatives that set the Court on a path towards modernization and greater openness and accountability.

This Strategic Plan presents a series of systemwide initiatives, but does not present a comprehensive list of all activities that may be undertaken in the future. This flexibility will better support the evolving needs, issues, and available resources within our court community. This plan is also a living document that is reviewed and adjusted on a regular basis while maintaining a focus on achieving and maintaining a fair, accessible and independent Court.

OUR VISION AND MISSION STATEMENTS

VISION STATEMENT OF THE NINETEENTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT LAKE COUNTY

The vision of the Lake County Judicial System is to be one truly independent and empowered branch of government providing a fair and responsive system of justice while protecting rights and liberties, upholding and interpreting the law, and resolve disputes peacefully, fairly and effectively in Lake County, Illinois. This includes an effectively managed Judiciary and Judicial System that fully utilizes technological advancement and alternative dispute resolution to best serve the public, while seeking the highest possible understanding, trust and confidence.

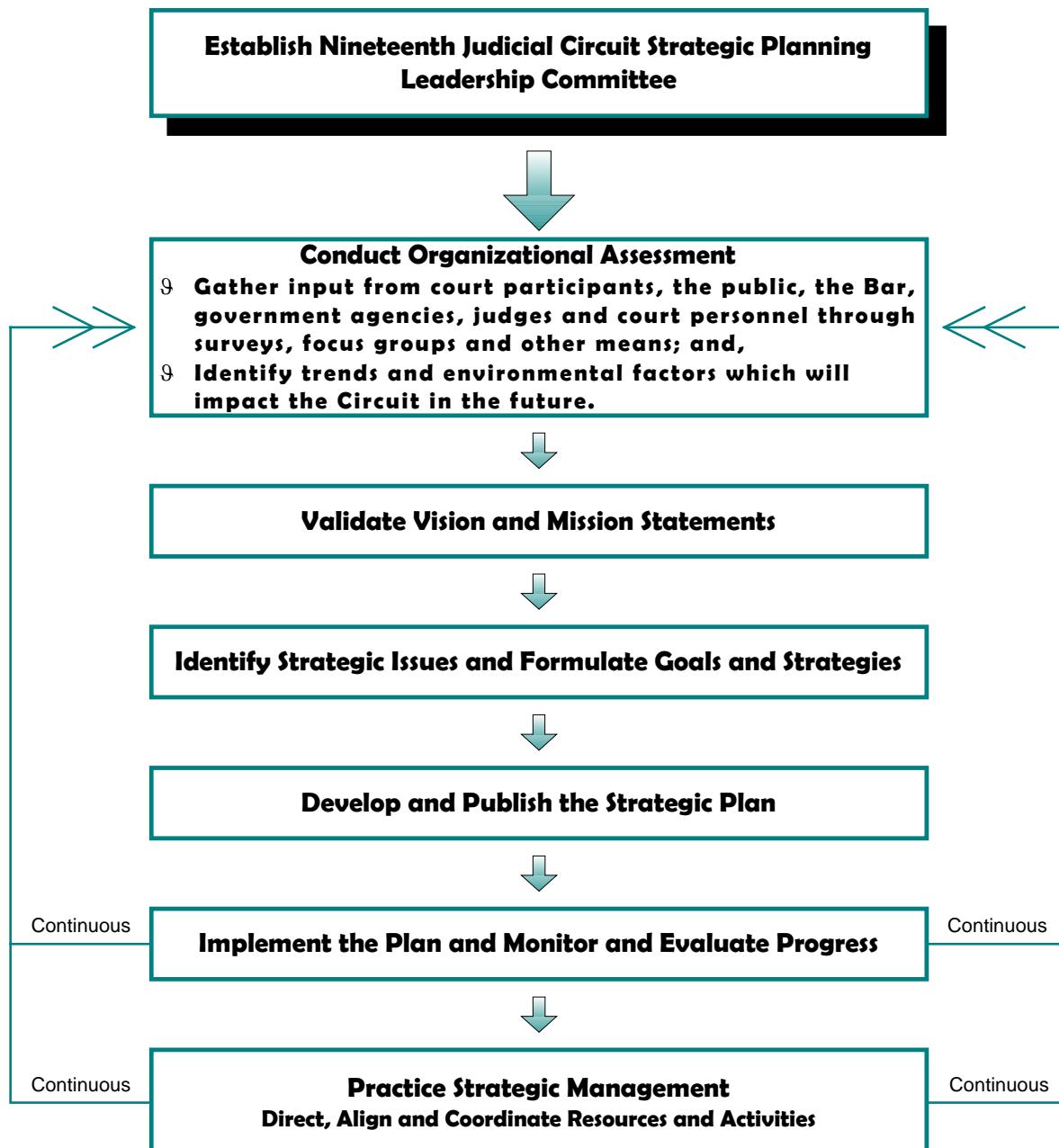
MISSION STATEMENT OF THE NINETEENTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT LAKE COUNTY

The mission of the Circuit Court of Lake County is to serve the public. It accomplishes this mission by providing a fair and efficient system of justice, committed to excellence, fostering public trust, understanding and confidence.

I. HOW THIS PLAN WAS DEVELOPED

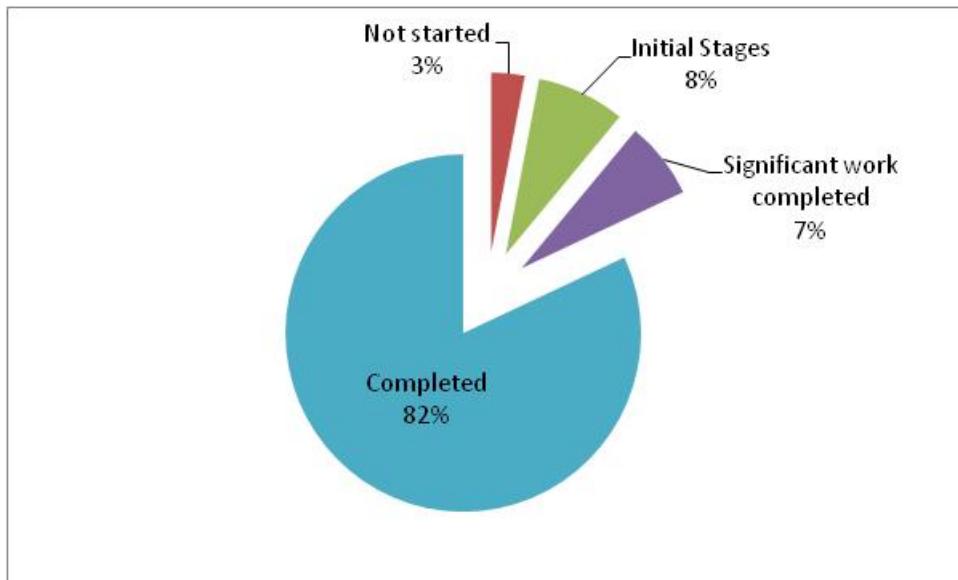
The Strategic Plan of the Circuit Court of Lake County is an evolving process that began in 1996 with the development of the first long-range plan. That plan was updated in 2000 and the current plan is the third iteration.

The planning process is depicted in the following graphic:



Outcomes from 2000 Strategic Plan

The Strategic Plan in 2000 consisted of 5 goals and 22 objectives that, like this Strategic Plan, embrace the Trial Court Performance Standards. There were 197 implementing strategies supporting these goals and objectives. The following chart displays the outcomes from the 2000 Strategic Plan:



Some of the highlights resulting from the 2000 Strategic Plan include:

- ✓ Significant enhancements were made to the Court's website to the point where the website was judged 4th best at the Court Technology Conference in 2005.
- ✓ The Court's Annual Report moved from paper to electronic, and is being produced on CD-Rom and available on the website.
- ✓ Two new branch traffic courts were opened along with a new Adult Probation and Psychological Service building and satellite APPS offices throughout Lake County.
- ✓ Various ADA enhancements were put into place throughout the organization to include new TTD/TTY devices, signage and a motorized handicapped cart, which is available to all users coming to the main courthouse facility.
- ✓ Significant improvements were made in the area of security and disaster plans, including: new identification cards, proximity readers and wafers, cameras throughout all of the Court's facilities, plans developed or updated, Nextel Telenav tracking system was added for probation officer safety, and a weather related Continuity of Operations Plan was developed.
- ✓ Case Management training was conducted with the Judges and an overall case management plan was developed involving each of the Court divisions.

- ✓ Considerable augmentation was made to the Court's numerous outreach and educational programs by upgrading informational items and providing reference materials to our community. Major events included: hosting the regional mock trial tournament for over 50 colleges and universities, mock trial competition for local high school students, senior day, law day, juror appreciation day and a number of videos that cover judicial topics.
- ✓ Introduction of a "Pride Through Performance" campaign that resulted in a number of new initiatives involving judges and staff. Some of these successes are: Evidence Based Practices, Group Reporting, Gender Specific Programming, Drug Court, Mental Health Court, E-Benchbook, Customer Service Handbook, and 13 National Association of Counties Awards.
- ✓ Considerable advancements were achieved in the area of technology, including: a new jury management system, upgrading of over 300 devices – both hardware and software, a new presentation system consisting of plasma screens with laptop/CD/DVD/VHS capabilities, remote access to needed operating systems in support of telecommuting, various added technologies in support of the Court's Self-Representation Center, imaging of probation and administrative files, a number of new diagnostic tools to assist adult and juvenile probation officers in determining risk factors, and numerous other software enhancements to increase productivity.
- ✓ A considerable effort was placed on performance measurement. In addition to the needed hardware and software, the Court embraced the SMAART Program, which stands for:

Specific

outcome-based goals / standards / targets of achievement

Measurable

honest measurers – not abstract or subjective

Aggressive, yet

Achievable

push the envelope but be realistic

Relevant

directly relevant to the challenge at hand – goals, standards, targets,

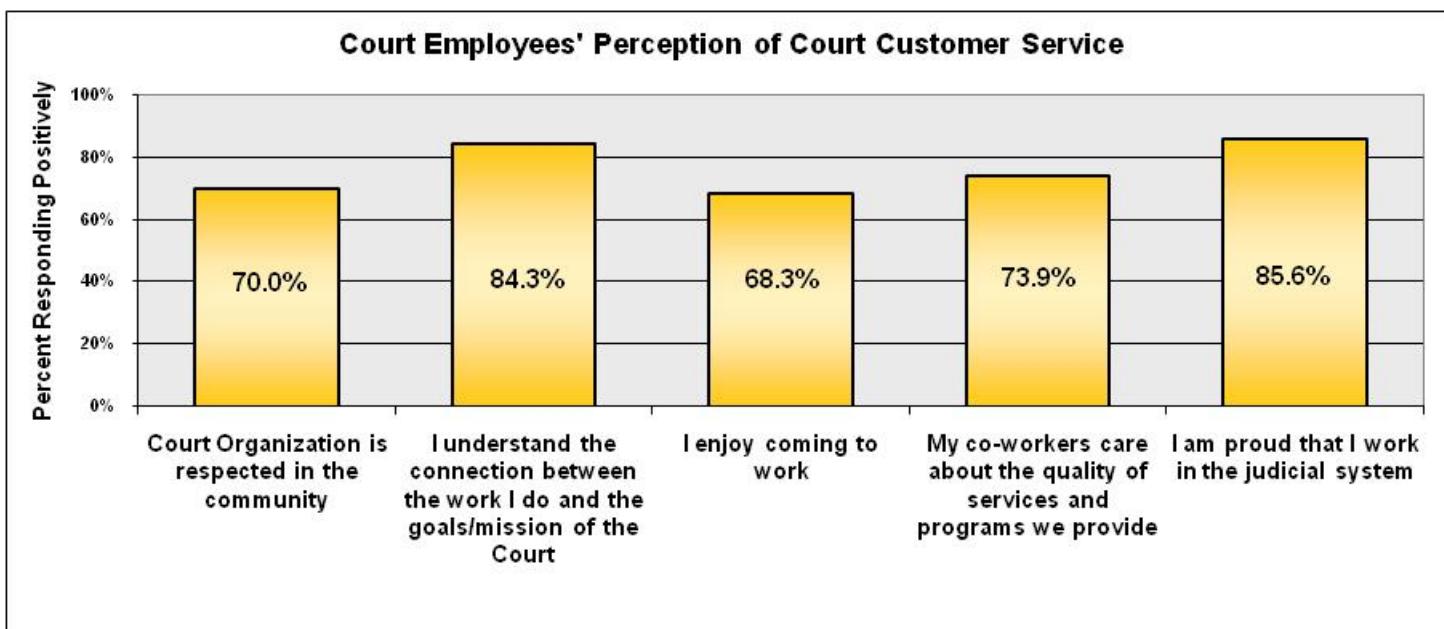
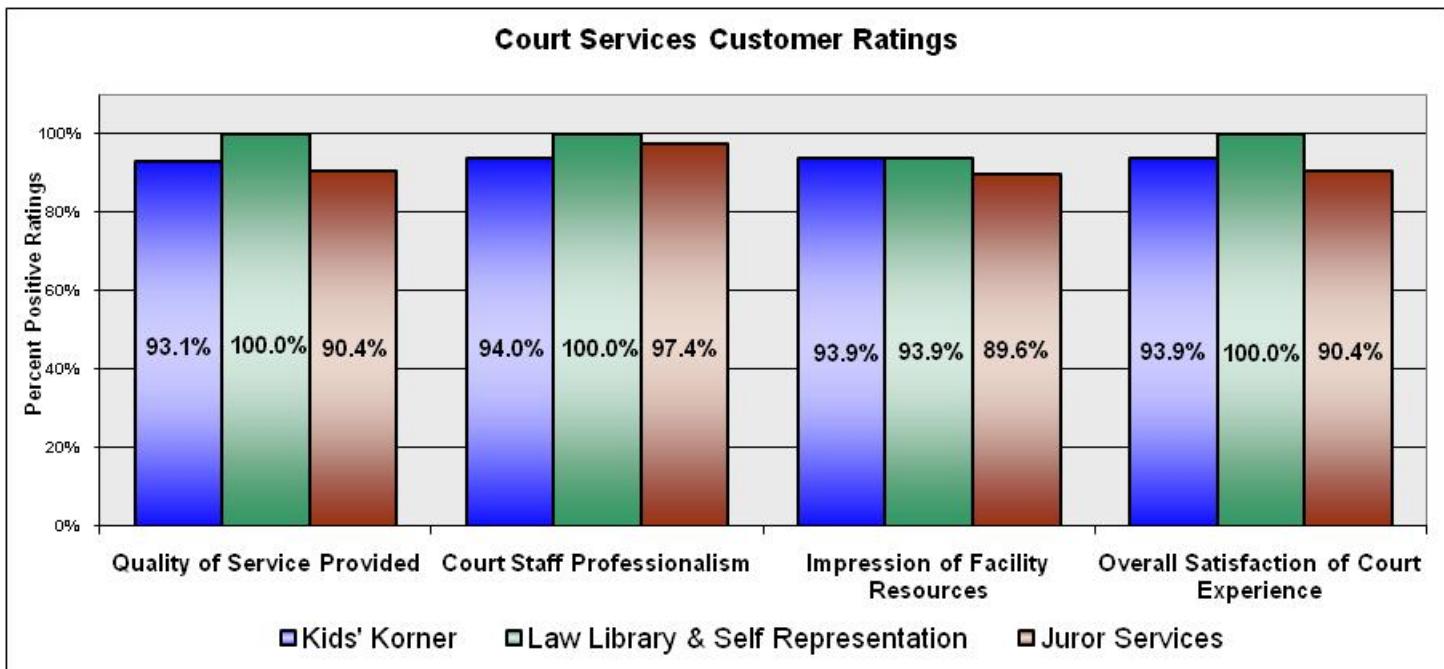
Time-sensitive

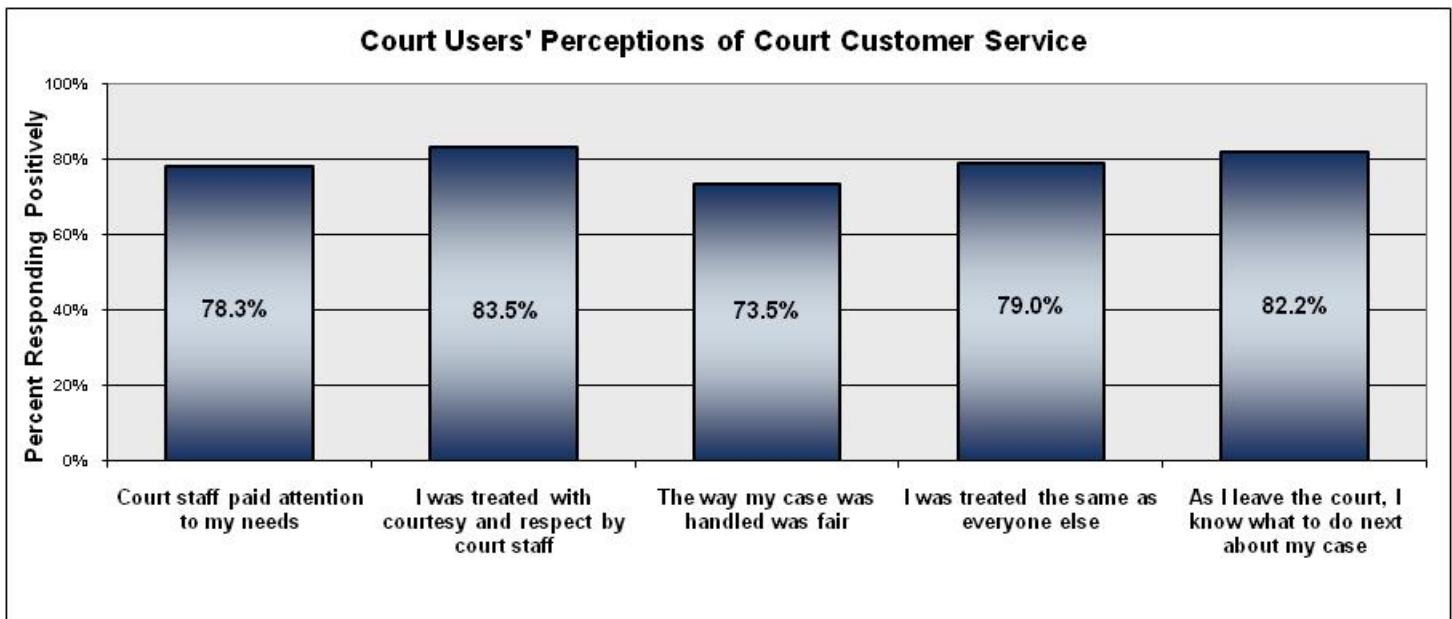
closure based on target dates and not always calendar/budget year

How We Are Viewed by Our Customers

Any Strategic Plan must be ultimately judged by how it affects customers. This Strategic Plan includes several strategies that seek feedback from lawyers, litigants, witnesses, jurors, court staff, ancillary agencies and the public at large. Late in 2007, the Court conducted several customer service surveys and the results are gratifyingly high across the board. However, this only sets the bar high as continuous improvements and regular monitoring of outcomes are expected to be standard procedures in the years to come.

The 2007 customer survey results are provided, below:





II. WHAT WE BELIEVE

The judges and staff of the Circuit Court of Lake County believe that in order to achieve fair and accessible justice to the public and to fulfill its responsibilities, we must deliver court services within the context of the Trial Court Performance Standards.* These standards were developed by legal and court professionals as a methodology to measure how well courts are performing in four major areas:

- A. **ACCESS TO JUSTICE - Courts and the justice they deliver should be both accessible and perceived by the public as accessible.**
- B. **EXPEDITION AND TIMELINESS - The public should have confidence that basic court functions are being conducted expeditiously and fairly.**
- C. **EQUALITY, FAIRNESS AND INTEGRITY - Courts should provide due process and equal protection of the law to all who have business before them, and its decisions should have integrity.**
- D. **INDEPENDENCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY - The court should be independent, not unduly influenced by other components of government, and accountable for responsible use of its resources.**

We believe that if a court conducts its business and develops programs within this contextual framework, it will achieve the final performance area:

- E. **PUBLIC TRUST AND CONFIDENCE - Public trust and confidence is achieved when a court demonstrates that it provides Access to Justice; Expedition and Timeliness; Equality, Fairness, and Integrity; and Independence and Accountability.**

* The effort to develop Trial Court Performance Standards began in 1987 as a collaboration between the National Center for State Courts and the Bureau of Justice Assistance (of the U.S. Department of Justice). Its purpose is to provide a common language for describing, classifying, and measuring the performance of trial courts and it has become an invaluable resource for enhancing a court's ability to provide fair and efficient adjudication and disposition of cases. For additional information and TCPS implementation resources, see http://www.ncsconline.org/D_Research/TCPS/index.html.

III. THE STANDARDS WE HAVE SET FOR OURSELVES

The Circuit Court of Lake County has long enjoyed a reputation for high quality justice, and is committed to ensuring fairness, due process and equal protection for all litigants. At the same time, the Court is fortunate to have a judiciary recognized as one of the most distinguished in the country, and a highly talented and experienced administrative staff dedicated to quality public service. In order to promote **PUBLIC TRUST AND CONFIDENCE**, which is essential to maintaining an orderly democratic society, the Nineteenth Judicial Circuit of Lake County judges and court staff have adopted the following standards:

A. ACCESS TO JUSTICE

1. Public Proceedings

Standard: The Circuit Court of Lake County shall conduct its proceedings and other public business openly.

2. Safety, Accessibility and Convenience

Standard: The Court facilities shall be safe, accessible and convenient to use.

3. Effective Participation

Standard: All who appear before the Court shall be given the opportunity to participate effectively without undue hardship or inconvenience.

4. Courtesy, Responsiveness and Respect

Standard: Judges and other trial court personnel shall be courteous and responsive to the public and accord respect to all with whom they come into contact.

5. Affordable Costs

Standard: The costs of access to the Court's proceedings – whether measured in terms of money, time, or the procedures that must be followed – shall be reasonable, fair and affordable.

B. EXPEDITION AND TIMELINESS

1. Case Processing

Standard: The Court shall establish and comply with recognized guidelines for timely case processing, while at the same time keeping current with its incoming caseload.

2. Compliance with Schedules

Standard: The Court shall disburse funds promptly, provide reports and information according to required schedules, and respond to requests for information and other services on an established schedule that assures their effective use.

3. Prompt Implementation of Law and Procedure

Standard: The Court shall promptly implement changes in law and procedure.

C. EQUALITY, FAIRNESS AND INTEGRITY

1. Fair and Reliable Procedures

Standard: The trial court procedures shall faithfully adhere to relevant laws, procedural rules and established policies.

2. Juries

Standard: Jury lists shall be representative of the jurisdiction from which they are drawn.

3. Court Decision and Actions

Standard: The Court shall give individual attention to cases, deciding them without undue disparity among like cases and upon legally relevant factors.

4. Clarity

Standard: Decisions of the Court shall unambiguously address the issues presented to it and make clear how compliance can be achieved.

5. Responsibility for Enforcement

Standard: The Court shall take appropriate responsibility for the enforcement of its orders.

6. Production and Preservation of Records

Standard: Records of all relevant court decisions and actions shall be accurate and properly preserved.

D. INDEPENDENCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

1. Independence and Comity

Standard: The Court shall maintain its institutional integrity and observe the principle of comity in its governmental relations.

2. Accountability for Public Resources

Standard: The Court shall responsibly seek, use and account for its public resources.

3. Personnel Practices and Decisions

Standard: The Court shall use fair employment practices.

4. Public Education

Standard: The Court shall inform the community of its programs.

5. Response to Change

Standard: The Court shall, to the best of its ability, anticipate new conditions or emergent events and adjust its operations as necessary.

IV. TRENDS CONSIDERED WHEN DEVELOPING THIS PLAN

A Strategic Plan cannot be developed in a vacuum. When determining the strategic direction of the Court, the judges and court staff consulted several sources in an effort to gauge societal trends, demographic shifts in the community, issues facing other U.S. trial courts and economic forecasts.

A **trend** is a series of related events or activities that appear to have a demonstrable direction over time. Conducting a trends analysis is an important step in a strategic planning process. It helps assess: 1) the nature, magnitude, and sources of demands likely to be placed on the Court in the upcoming years; and 2) the implications of the demands on the Court's structure, organization and operations in the future.

There are many types and categories of trends - social, economic, political/ policy, and technological/scientific trends are considered in the development of this plan. Below is a summary of this trends analysis. Included are the trends that will most significantly impact the Court in the future, and a few of the possible implications on the Court.

TRENDS

Social trends describe the changes in the composition, order and structure of interactions among individuals within society. In large part, they define the size and nature of the justice system client population. A few of the most significant social trends likely to impact the Court in the future are as follows:

1. Increase in population.
2. Aging population.
3. Increase in racial, ethnic and cultural diversity.
4. Increasing polarization of people by class, race, ethnicity and lifestyles.
5. Continued alterations in family composition.
6. Shifting population centers in the County (from the south to the north).

Economic trends describe the changes in the relationships among individual well-being, the nature and composition of work and the work force, and societal prosperity. Economic trends directly affect the composition of caseloads, shape the basic resource foundations of the courts and justice system, and shape basic societal conditions. Below are a few of the most significant economic trends likely to impact the Court in the upcoming years.

1. Rising housing costs.

2. Increasing gap between the rich and poor.
3. Growing retail/service industry.
4. Transition to a more urban county/court.

Technological and scientific trends describe changes in the composition, application and broader social effects of tools and scientific developments and breakthroughs. Technological trends shape the types of demands confronting service organizations and hold the potential for dramatically altering the way organizations do their work or serve customers. Scientific trends shape new litigation areas and the need for specialized expertise. A few of the most significant technological and scientific trends that will impact the Court in the future are listed next.

1. The wireless revolution.
2. Rapidly changing information technology and telecommunications.
3. Increase in the use of the Internet.
4. Increase in identity theft.
5. Increase in legal challenges to privacy issues, life sciences and bioethics.

Policy and political trends describe the structure, receptiveness, responsiveness, priorities and effectiveness of forums for collective, public decision-making and resource distribution. They also describe preferred responses to societal problems and the appropriate roles of individuals in developing, implementing, monitoring, and modifying actions to group responses. Below are some of the policy and political trends that will likely impact the Court in the upcoming years.

1. Changing expectations of the public for government solutions.
2. Changing role of judges due to problem-solving techniques/therapeutic courts.
3. Increase in the number of civil cases opting for dispute resolution options outside of the Court.
4. Increase in the proportion and number of self-represented litigants.
5. Mission creep (i.e., courts increasingly providing programs and services that are traditionally executive branch or social service functions such as treatment, visitation supervision, etc.).
6. Changes in how judicial system services are provided.

IMPLICATIONS (OF THE TRENDS) ON THE COURT

The trends noted above will *not* occur independently. Rather, they will occur simultaneously, interacting in a myriad of ways. The impact of the aforementioned trends on the Court will likely be great. A few of the most significant implications for the Court are as follows.

1. The Court will likely experience rising caseloads. In addition, the types of cases filed will likely be more complex and result in increased workloads for judges and court staff.
2. The Court's users are expected to change in the future. For example, a greater proportion likely will be non-English speaking, elderly, more racially and ethnically diverse, and self-represented. Making the Court more user-friendly and understandable will require additional programs and services for these types of court users.
3. The Court's current facilities are inadequate for the demands of the future. In particular, space and parking are insufficient and many court-provided programs and services are not accessible in convenient locations throughout the county.
4. The public will increasingly expect the Court to be more user-friendly and accessible (e.g., more understandable, ADA compliant, doing business from remote locations). The public also will increasingly expect the Court to provide enhanced and expanded programs and services (e.g., interpreters, child care, self-help, drug treatment). Consequently, the Court likely will struggle with 1) having the resources needed to enhance access; 2) expanding programs and services; and 3) responding effectively to "mission creep" (i.e., providing services and programs that are traditionally executive branch functions).
5. The Court will likely continue to experience pressure to be more efficient and effective with existing or declining resources, and to be more responsible and accountable.
6. Continued collaboration with other governmental agencies, justice system partners, and stakeholders will be even more important in the future.

ORGANIZATIONAL ASSESSMENT

The purpose of an ***organizational assessment*** is to help an organization evaluate its capacity both now and in the future in light of its purpose and its desired vision. Our analysis was a process of identifying the Court organization's strengths, weaknesses and opportunities, given its mission, vision, and the implications of a variety of trends. This step of the strategic planning process helps an organization critically assess its ability to do its business better and differently in the future.

The Court has implemented CourTools Measurement 1 on Access and Fairness as a first step toward this self-evaluation. Time limitations did not allow for a more comprehensive analysis. Nonetheless, below is a brief summary of the Court organization's strengths and areas for improvement, as determined by focus group discussions with judges and court staff. Indeed, the Court organization has many strengths; it does many things well especially in light of its current funding levels. It also has areas in which it can and must improve in the future given the likely demands and pressures the Court organization will face.

STRENGTHS AND AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Examples of the Court organization's strengths are as follows:

1. High quality employees
2. Efficient case management (e.g., a direct calendaring system)
3. Quality and level of services provided by court staff
4. Continuous efforts to improve
5. A distinguished record of accomplishment and innovation, such as the Kid's Corner, E-benchbook, Arbitration & Mediation Center, new judge training program and many other examples

A few areas for improvement include:

1. Facilities and technology
2. Communication and collaboration with justice system partners, stakeholders and the public
3. Timely disposition of cases and reduction of backlogs
4. Communication/information sharing throughout the Court (e.g., among judges, among judges and executive managers, from managers to staff, across divisions and units, and among supervisors and staff within units)
5. Systems integration and information sharing between the Court, ancillary justice agencies and service providers
6. Collaboration with the Circuit Court Clerk's office to improve case processing, the integrity of the record and public service

OPPORTUNITIES

Court staff identified the following opportunities facing the Court organization in the upcoming years, including:

1. Improving customer service
2. Enhancing facilities, space and security
3. Enhancing the system by becoming more efficient
4. Lobbying for additional funds and pursuing grant opportunities
5. Reaching out to and educating the public
6. Providing a full range of services in both/additional court locations
7. Developing/enhancing training programs for staff and cross-training staff
8. Improving advancement opportunities for staff
9. Expanding programs and services
10. Enhancing communication throughout the Court

V. OUR STRATEGIES AND PLANS

This Strategic Plan of the Circuit Court of Lake County is a vision that identifies numerous strategies based on values important to the effective administration of justice. Each strategy and its related implementation plan focuses energy and resources to perpetuate both the values of the system and its continued improvement. This section of the Strategic Plan does not present a comprehensive list of all activities that may be undertaken in the future. Rather, it will be revised and updated based on evolving needs, emerging issues and available resources.

The plan as a whole is revised annually with specific initiatives reviewed, amended or modified as needed. This flexibility will assure the Court that:

- Decisions are based on the best interests of the public and the court system as a whole.
- Business is based on an underlying commitment to equal and timely justice and to public access to an independent forum for the resolution of disputes.
- The continued development of an accessible, independent court system is ensured through planning, research and evaluation of programs and through the use of modern management approaches and technological developments.

The judges and court staff of the Nineteenth Judicial Circuit of Lake County adopt the following strategies and plans to achieve our goals.

STRATEGY

A. Develop and update a master facilities plan which documents courtroom and staff space needs.

PLANS TO IMPLEMENT THIS STRATEGY

- ❖ Work with the County Board and county administration to confirm space needs and secure adequate funding to construct a Criminal Court Building.
- ❖ Complete a juvenile court complex and probation space plan.
- ❖ Continue to expand the number of courtrooms at each of the current branch court facilities.
- ❖ Continue to provide and upgrade accommodations for juror safety, security, stress management, comfort and convenience.
- ❖ Work with the Circuit Court Clerk to develop an adequate records storage facility that preserves records and allows for easy retrieval.

- ◆ Ensure periodic review of courtrooms for appropriate acoustics, lighting and accessibility.
- ◆ Continue to advance ADA accessibility.
- ◆ Evaluate use of biometrics to allow secure access to facilities by authorized users.
- ◆ Incorporate as much “green” and energy efficiency as possible.

STRATEGY

B. Continue to improve the court’s website with particular emphasis on interactive functionality that enables court users to transact business without the necessity of appearing in person.

PLANS TO IMPLEMENT THIS STRATEGY

- ◆ Improve online jury services.
- ◆ Provide case-specific status inquiry, including docket information and register of actions with appropriate privacy safeguards.
- ◆ Implement E-filing applications in as many case types as possible.
- ◆ Improve online self-service resources.
- ◆ Provide services in multiple languages.

STRATEGY

C. Promote the expansion of and types of court services offered in the branch courts as a convenience and to improve accessibility by the public and the Bar.

PLANS TO IMPLEMENT THIS STRATEGY

- ◆ Develop an action plan for future growth for the Mundelein, Park City and the Round Lake Beach Branch Courts.
- ◆ Offer probation services, circuit clerk substations and neutral visitation sites at branch court locations.
- ◆ Enhance court compliance office services in branch courts.

STRATEGY

D. Promote accessibility of court facilities by continually improving signage, directories, displays of calendars and receptionist services.

PLANS TO IMPLEMENT THIS STRATEGY

- ◆ Expand wireless connectivity in all major court facilities.

- ◆ Install plasma screen calendar displays in the most effective areas within each facility.
- ◆ Install street directional signage to assist the public in locating court facilities.
- ◆ Establish an information desk at the south entrance of the main courthouse.

STRATEGY

E. Effectively use technology to make the services of the court more accessible, secure, convenient to use and cost effective.

PLANS TO IMPLEMENT THIS STRATEGY

- ◆ Install kiosks providing electronic accessibility to court files and dockets, with adequate privacy safeguards.
- ◆ Implement and expand video conferencing to reduce the need for parties, witnesses and defendants to appear in person.
- ◆ Review security needs and acquire appropriate equipment and technology to address these needs.
- ◆ Install a traffic signal at the entrance of the juvenile facility.
- ◆ Work with the circuit clerk to allow payment of fines and fees electronically.
- ◆ Work with the circuit clerk to allow Internet access to court files and dockets, with adequate privacy safeguards.
- ◆ Use advanced electronic, audio and video technology to improve services such as recording civil testimony, receiving status reports, calendaring cases, conducting meetings, holding bail hearings, conducting hearings for emergency orders of protection, issuing search/arrest warrants and holding motion calls.
- ◆ Revamp and integrate the court docketing and calendaring systems.
- ◆ Continue to develop and refine online benchbooks with mechanisms to promote feedback for updates.
- ◆ Work with the circuit clerk and the county to promote and acquire a cost effective, flexible and secure IT environment that is easy to use and maintain.
- ◆ Develop new and refine existing automation training for judges, court staff and the Bar.
- ◆ Provide frequent training programs on court technology for the judiciary.
- ◆ Promote records storage and retrieval solutions that are easy to use and do not require extensive writing or key stroke data entry.
- ◆ Use interactive voice response systems for better customer outreach.
- ◆ Use signature capture devices for pre-sentence investigation reports, human resource needs and other business processes.

- ◆ Use project management, change management, risk management and system lifecycle disciplines to manage information technology.
- ◆ Enact the 10 CourTools measurement instruments to measure court performance (CourTools Measure 1 on Access and Fairness has already been implemented).
- ◆ Improve payment options for court fees and fines, allowing installment payments and accepting credit cards to increase compliance.
- ◆ Implement email and fax-from-the-desktop to improve notification capacity.

STRATEGY

F. **Continue and expand training of judges and court staff to promote improved customer service, technical skills and professional development.**

PLANS TO IMPLEMENT THIS STRATEGY

- ◆ Provide personal security training.
- ◆ Practice and refine procedures for emergency response.
- ◆ Promote cultural diversity, organizational values and operational protocols.
- ◆ Encourage and accommodate external training opportunities while improving the means of tracking how such training will improve operations.
- ◆ Appoint a peer group of senior judges to assist newer judges in calendar management issues.
- ◆ Implement judicial self-improvement programs that include judges visiting other jurisdictions.
- ◆ Provide advance general and individualized education and training for judges prior to assignment to new court calls.
- ◆ Improve training on employee performance appraisals.
- ◆ Develop comprehensive and timely new employee orientation programs.
- ◆ Work towards enhancing the county's tuition reimbursement program.
- ◆ Provide supervisory training on the availability and use of the County's employee assistance program.
- ◆ Ensure adequate training for court security officers.
- ◆ Continue annual judicial training day and include topical/trends content.

STRATEGY

G. Improve caseflow and reduce delay by implementing the caseflow management plan.

PLANS TO IMPLEMENT THIS STRATEGY

- ◆ Implement the recommendations that have been prioritized by the caseflow committee.
- ◆ Review traffic procedures to reduce labor intensity, excessive need for personal court appearances, effective use of technology and improved compliance.
- ◆ Expand ADR programs and develop “collaborative” ADR options
- ◆ Conduct regular reviews of the efficiency and efficacy of the arbitration program.
- ◆ Evaluate the creation of a comprehensive family court to handle all divorce, juvenile, adoption, guardianship and related case types.
- ◆ Reduce status appearances by using non-judicial personnel for scheduling purposes.
- ◆ Expand pretrial probation services at case intake to facilitate prompt case processing.
- ◆ Increase funding for pretrial bond services.
- ◆ Structure family and divorce court calls to allow for more consecutive days of trial in long cases.
- ◆ Develop time-to-disposition goals for all case types.
- ◆ Implement the family facilitator position.
- ◆ Maximize interdivisional access to a back-up judge.
- ◆ Expand the job description of caseflow coordinator to include coordination of social services in family cases requiring evaluation, managed treatment or supervised visitation.

STRATEGY

H. Improve services and programs to assist self-represented litigants.

PLANS TO IMPLEMENT THIS STRATEGY

- ◆ Improve informational pamphlets and distribution of pamphlets.
- ◆ Include additional self-help functionality on the court website.
- ◆ Work with the Bar to develop effective referral procedures for those seeking an attorney and for those in need of low/no cost legal advice.
- ◆ Expand programs and services at the Center for Self-Representation.

STRATEGY

I. Improve court forms and procedures to promote ease of use by judges, court staff, the public and the Bar.

PLANS TO IMPLEMENT THIS STRATEGY

- ◆ Retain a court forms expert to assist in review of existing forms and to give direction to the judges' Forms Committee and staff.
- ◆ Promote more forms-on-demand instead of stocking pre-printed forms.
- ◆ Develop forms that support multiple languages.
- ◆ Continue to improve accessibility to forms on the court website.
- ◆ Create uniform orders for general use in the various courtrooms.
- ◆ Develop and implement reminder/confirmation procedures and technology to promote improved appearance rates by parties, families and clients at meetings, court hearings and other important events.
- ◆ Hire employees with multiple language skills in order to meet the needs of a diverse community.
- ◆ Utilize imaging and document management technologies.
- ◆ Review records management and retention schedules to ensure best practice.

STRATEGY

J. Collaborate with stakeholders, ancillary justice agencies and private support providers to ensure that judges have sufficient information to make informed decisions

PLANS TO IMPLEMENT THIS STRATEGY

- ◆ Streamline referrals to and from private providers for mental health, alcohol, domestic violence and similar assessments.
- ◆ Maintain a close working relationship with the circuit clerk to solve problems that arise in the daily and ongoing work of maintaining and preserving the court record, and establish a baseline performance service level.
- ◆ Improve data exchange with private providers by promoting electronic reporting.
- ◆ Promote the electronic transfer of court orders and referrals to probation, state's attorney, public defender, private service providers, interpreters and private counsel.
- ◆ Enhance the distribution of information by the creation of a comprehensive, integrated information distribution network to connect and serve the entire judicial branch, related agencies and the public.

STRATEGY

K. Continually improve external communications, especially with the public, Bar, funding agencies and justice partners.

PLANS TO IMPLEMENT THIS STRATEGY

- ◆ Continue to involve the public and the Bar in the screening and evaluation of judicial candidates.
- ◆ Develop policies to promote consistent handling of complaints about judges by the public and the Bar.
- ◆ Articulate the court's need for adequate judicial and non-judicial staffing.
- ◆ Update court partners on changes in the law.
- ◆ Expand programs for juror appreciation and input, and monitor this feedback.
- ◆ Revise handout to traffic offenders explaining the procedures for court appearances, the diversion program, jury demands and payment of fines.
- ◆ Develop and maintain a strong association with the Lake County Board and its standing committees; legislators; mayors and township leaders; law enforcement; education; and service providers.
- ◆ Seek feedback from Lake County departments and service providers on a regular basis.
- ◆ Confer with criminal justice stakeholders regularly for feedback and to track trends.
- ◆ Proactively engage with state and local bar associations and committees.
- ◆ Hold regular formal and informal meetings with the Lake County Bar Association.
- ◆ Continue media informational programs regarding the role of the court.
- ◆ Expand the judicial speakers bureau to include staff and provide necessary content support.
- ◆ Develop a judicial public information and education agenda.
- ◆ Maintain close relations with other circuits, appellate courts and the Supreme Court to promote common goals and interests.
- ◆ Encourage judge and staff involvement in community and civic activities.
- ◆ Host at least one annual County Board committee meeting and site visit.

STRATEGY

L. Contain the cost of litigation and court services to ensure equal access.

PLANS TO IMPLEMENT THIS STRATEGY

- ◆ Periodically review the services and fees of private providers.
- ◆ Support public funding to pay for *guardian ad litem* costs for disabled indigent adults in guardianship proceedings.
- ◆ Educate judges and staff about fee structures and their impact on court operations.
- ◆ Ensure that convenient parking and public transportation is available for all who conduct business with the court.
- ◆ Continue to provide no-cost psychological evaluations and counseling.

STRATEGY

M. Continually improve court operations and service delivery of the judicial branch.

PLANS TO IMPLEMENT THIS STRATEGY

- ◆ Develop regular in-service reviews in each division and specialty court to identify efficiencies, ensure that new laws are implemented and promote timely case processing.
- ◆ Improve the JOLT program to promote ease of decision making and understandability.
- ◆ Continue to draw jurors from all walks of life and all areas of the county.
- ◆ Continue to improve communication with jurors, especially relating to orientation on the nature and importance of service.
- ◆ Investigate the feasibility of limiting jury service to one trial.
- ◆ Refine methods to separate jurors from potential contact with lawyers and litigants.
- ◆ Establish a committee of judges and staff to review the court's records for accuracy and proper preservation.
- ◆ Track legislative bills and case law that will affect the court's procedures, rulings and operations.
- ◆ Provide training and resources to adequately deal with marginally performing staff.
- ◆ Review adequacy of staff levels for the timely and efficient delivery of services to the public, attorneys and adult/juvenile offenders, and seek additional resources when needed.

- ◆ Explore alternative sanctions programs (such as day reporting centers).
- ◆ Examine additional funding sources such as grants, foundations and state/federal funding.
- ◆ Maintain a flexible organizational structure that is responsive, fully utilizes staff expertise and promotes a positive work environment.
- ◆ Design and implement a score card technique to evaluate the effectiveness of court operations.
- ◆ Evaluate and maintain adequate compensation for all judicial employees.
- ◆ Develop private sector/county/court partnership models to maximize available services.
- ◆ Use SMAART performance measures to complete at least three programs evaluations each year.
- ◆ Develop a COOP plan including identification of a sister-court “hot site.”
- ◆ Implement more “restorative justice solutions.”
- ◆ Develop awareness training on the needs of the elderly as an increasing customer base.
- ◆ Increase use of joint purchasing and share services with external agencies where appropriate.

VI. HOW WE WILL IMPLEMENT THESE PLANS

The Court's Strategic Plan is ambitious especially in light of the increasing demands and pressures the Court will face in the future and because of its limited resources. Nonetheless, following through on the strategic roadmap and priorities is paramount if the Court is to continue to provide high levels of judicial and staff services in the years ahead.

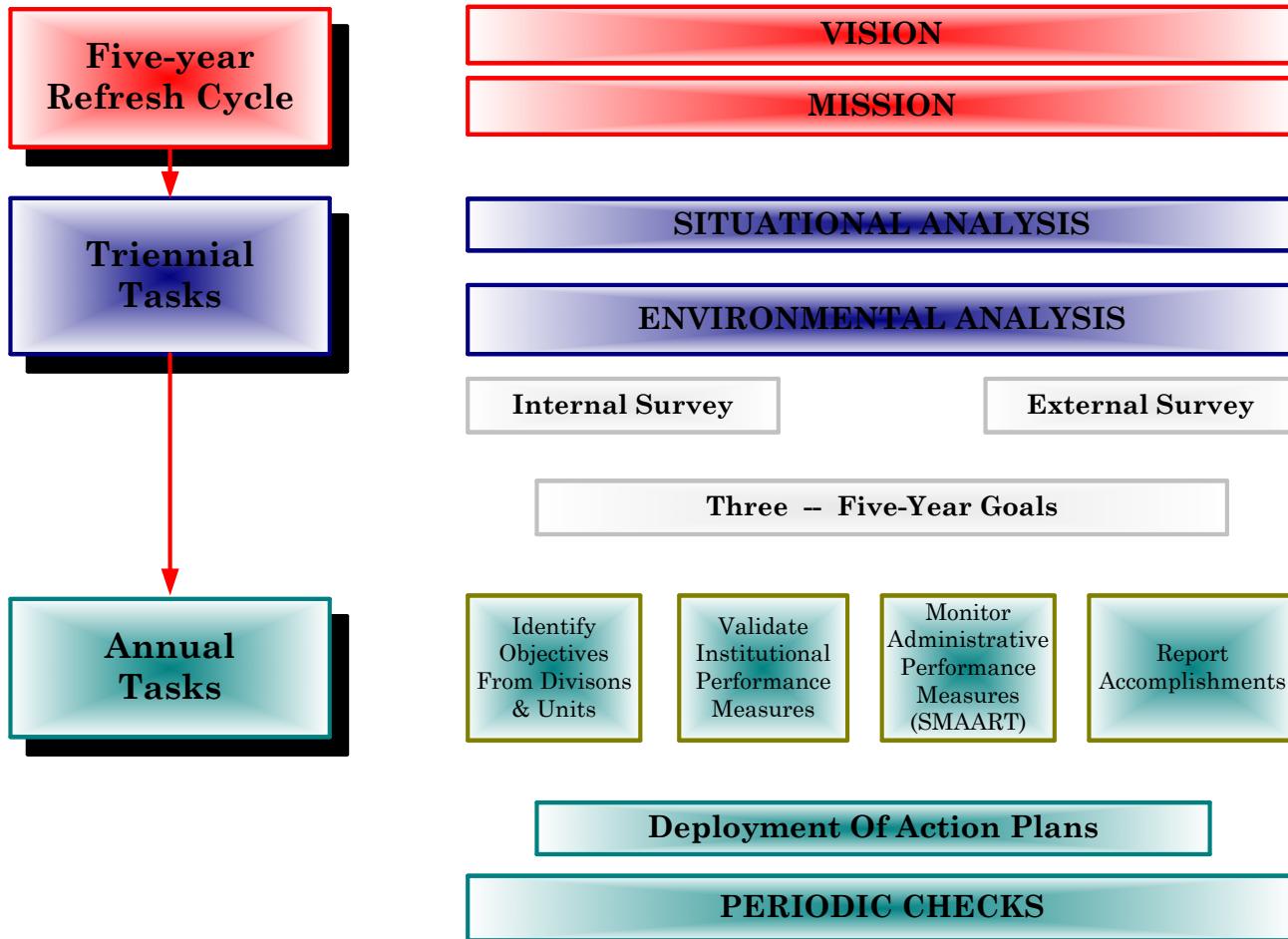
Success in implementing the strategic plan will require focus and perseverance on the part of the Court's judicial and administrative leadership and all staff. Specifically, as a blueprint to the future, success in part will depend on aligning the Court's fiscal and other resources, and making judicial, management and operational decisions, with the Court's direction and priorities.

In addition, in order to ensure that the Strategic Plan remains a vibrant blueprint for the Court in the years ahead, it will be important to: 1) communicate and build support for the plan, 2) involve many judges, managers and staff in the Court's strategic initiatives/programs/activities, 3) regularly monitor progress on the Court's strategic initiatives/programs/activities, and 4) review and modify the Strategic Plan at least annually and/or as conditions warrant.

The graphic on the following page depicts the development and monitoring process for this Strategic Plan:



19th Judicial Circuit Strategic Planning Model



The values, standards, strategies and goals articulated in this strategic plan will be implemented as follows:

1. By tracking and reporting progress in the annual State of the Judiciary report;
2. By assigning individual tasks to the various standing and special judicial committees;
3. By renewed commitment to the J-team, with whom this plan will be briefed and tracked;
4. By maintenance of trends analysis to make adjustments in the plan, as needed; and
5. By acquisition and use of project tracking software that will facilitate reporting of the status of various aspects of the Plan.