



## Access and Fairness Survey 2007 - 2013

**Administrative Office of  
The Circuit Court of Lake County,  
Illinois**

**SMAART  
Performance Management Program  
Report**



**Nineteenth Judicial Circuit Court of Lake County, Illinois**  
**Access and Fairness Survey**

**Mission Statement:**

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

The Administrative Office of the Circuit Court supports this mission by providing a broad range of professional services and programs to the court, court users, and to the general public. The Administrative Office assists the Chief Judge in carrying out his/her administrative duties in order for the circuit court to best serve the citizenry of Lake County. As an organization, the Court is committed to the highest quality and continuous improvement of the services and programs it provides to its customers.

**Survey Purpose:**

Each day the Nineteenth Judicial Circuit Court serves thousands of people who enter its courthouses and facilities throughout Lake County. These people come to the Court as attorneys, litigants, jurors, witnesses, family and friends, and casual observers. Court users seek justice for those issues that reflect the scope of human experiences: family disputes, civil rights, injury redress, commercial and financial disagreements, and criminal matters. Many court managers and stakeholders often assume that what matters most to court users is whether their case was won or lost. Research, however, consistently demonstrates that what influences court users' perceptions most about their court experience is how they feel they are treated in court, and whether the court's process of decision-making is considered to be fair.

The Circuit Court of Lake County, Illinois is committed to providing a court system in which the public has the highest levels of trust and confidence. Acquiring knowledge of its own strengths and deficiencies allows the court organization to work towards improving itself. The ***Access and Fairness Survey*** is a research tool for assessing court users' perceptions about their experiences in the courthouse. Assessing the opinions of court users allows the court organization to determine whether it is being responsive to the needs of its constituents. The survey allows court users to rate the court services that they receive in terms of accessibility and the fairness with which the court treats its customers. These topics are central to effective court operations and are consistent with the standards of performance that the court organization has established for itself:

**Access to the Court**

- *The Court facilities shall be safe, accessible and convenient to use.*
- *All who appear before the Court shall be given the opportunity to participate effectively without undue hardship or inconvenience.*
- *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.*
- *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.*

- *The Court shall...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.*

**Equality, Fairness and Integrity**

- *The trial court procedures shall faithfully adhere to relevant laws, procedural rules and established policies.*
- *The Court shall give individual attention to cases, deciding them without undue disparity among like cases and upon legally relevant factors.*
- *Decisions of the Court shall unambiguously address the issues presented to it and make clear how compliance can be achieved.*

**Survey Description:**

The **Access and Fairness Survey**, which measures court users' ratings of the accessibility and procedural fairness of the court, is a research-based assessment instrument developed by the National Center for State Courts (NCSC, 2005<sup>1</sup>) as part of the national CourTools—Trial Court Performance Measures initiative. Survey research conducted over the past thirty years with local trial court participants by NCSC, commercial entities, and academic institutions (Schauffler, 2007<sup>2</sup>) has consistently revealed that court users' perceptions of their court experiences are shaped less by the outcome of their case and more by how they felt they were treated in court and whether the court's decision-making process seemed fair. There are ten accessibility items in the survey that address such issues as navigating one's self to and around the court facility, the convenience of court services, and the professionalism demonstrated by court staff. For those who also participated as a party in a legal matter before a judge, the survey includes five procedural fairness items that address whether the court process allowed litigants to feel that they had a voice in and understood their court experience.

The Access and Fairness Survey utilizes a standardized format and core content so that survey results can be reliably compared throughout the court organization, as well as with other jurisdictions participating in the CourTools initiative. The survey questionnaire requires respondents to rate their level of agreement with each item statement on a five-point scale from "Strongly Disagree" (1) to "Strongly Agree" (5). In addition, a "Not Applicable" (N/A) option is also available as a response for those items that respondents felt were not a part of their court experience. The survey also includes background information about the respondent and the matter that brought them to the court that day. Everyone in the court facility (with the exception of judges and court staff) on a randomly selected "typical day" is asked to fill out the single-page, self-administered survey upon exiting the court facility. In both 2007 and 2010, the survey was available in both English and Spanish language versions. In 2010, court users were given the option of completing the survey online within one week of their experience in court, if filling out the survey on-site at that time was considered to be inconvenient or intrusive. Because the online response rate was extremely low ( $n=4$ ), the two-sided English/Spanish hard-copy survey was used solely in 2013.

Court managers are keenly aware that this single-day approach offers only a brief snapshot of court users' perceptions on that particular day, and may not be typical of all court users. Close analysis of the survey results and periodic surveying of this kind can, however, reveal issues on which judges, stakeholders, and

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<sup>1</sup> National Center for State Courts (2005). CourTools: Trial Court Performance Measures. Author: Williamsburg, VA.

[http://www.ncsconline.org/D\\_Research/CourTools/tcmp\\_courttools.htm](http://www.ncsconline.org/D_Research/CourTools/tcmp_courttools.htm)

<sup>2</sup> Schauffler, R.Y. (2007). Judicial accountability in the U.S. state courts –Measuring court performance. *Utrecht Law Review*, 3 (1), 112 – 128. Retrieved on 01/07/11 from <http://www.utrechtlawreview.org/index.php/ulr/article/viewFile/URN:NBN:NL:U1:10-1-101059/40>

court administration can focus change efforts in order to improve court services and heighten public trust and confidence in the judicial system. Comparison of results by location, court division, type of court customer, and among courts can yield valuable information, which can assist in improving court management practices.

### **Survey Results:**

The Nineteenth Judicial Circuit has conducted three court-wide assessments using the Access and Fairness Survey. The initial two surveys were each conducted on a single day - September 26, 2007 and September 23, 2010. Due to various issues, including the use of court staff (which removes them from their daily tasks) as well as the availability and logistics involved in coordinating a wholly volunteer staff, surveys in 2013 were administered at a single location on separate days. One or two volunteers were directly supervised at the sites by a single staff person. Survey administrators included students from Gateway Technical College (Kenosha, WI) and the College of Lake County.

Surveys were administered in each of the circuit's court facilities: Main Courthouse Complex (includes Annex & Babcox Center), Branch Courts (Mundelein, North Branch Court, Lakehurst in 2007 only, and Park City in 2010 & 2013 only)<sup>3</sup>, and the Depke Juvenile Center. Staff volunteers from the Division of Judicial Operations who had been oriented and trained in conducting the survey distributed surveys to respondents at each of seven facility exits in rotating shifts throughout the day. In order to increase the number of responses received, a complete Spanish-language version was included on the reverse side of the survey. In 2010, participants who indicated that they were unable to complete the survey at that time or expressed concerns with confidentiality were given the option of completing the survey within one week of their court experience on a secure website. Only four respondents participated using this method.

All respondents completed the first ten items dealing with issues of accessibility; only those who were a party to a legal case completed the five fairness items. A total of 480 surveys were completed and returned from each of the seven locations where the survey was conducted in 2007, compared to 306 respondents in 2010 (using volunteers only) and 491 in 2013 (using the revised methodology). Response rates for 2007 & 2010 are unknown because there was no method established to track those who refused to participate in the survey. Hand tabulation in 2013 revealed that approximately 50% of those offered the survey refused to participate. (Results varied between 40 and 60% based on location.)

The table below indicates the number of responses received at each court location for each of the years that the Access and Fairness Survey was conducted. All respondents were included in the Access items; only respondents who answered one or more of the Fairness items were included in that section. Although these results are far fewer than the number of court users that would be anticipated even on a typical court day, court researchers are apt to point out that the same types of persons are likely to respond to assessments of this type. Therefore, results gathered from a single point in time may not be representative of all court users, but over time can provide court administrators with meaningful information regarding change efforts.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The Lakehurst Branch Court closed in September 2008; all calls were moved to the Park City Branch Court.

<sup>4</sup> Ingo Keilitz – Principal Court Research Consultant, National Center for State Courts. (Personal Communication, Phoenix, AZ, April 2008.)

Court Location	Responses to 'Access' Items			Responses to 'Fairness' Items		
	2007	2010	2013	2007	2010	2013
Main Courthouse – North Entrance	80	79	75	54	62	62
Main Courthouse – Annex	114	52	65	87	37	46
Main Courthouse – Babcox Center	46	9	57	30	6	38
<b>Main Courthouse - Total</b>	<b>240</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>197</b>	<b>171</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>146</b>
Mundelein Branch Court	62	54	78	57	43	62
North Branch Court	76	23	75	56	13	56
Depke Juvenile Center	27	31	43	20	20	37
Lakehurst Branch Court	75	n/a	n/a	62	n/a	n/a
Park City Branch Court	n/a	58	68	n/a	50	43
<b>Circuit Court of Lake County - Total</b>	<b>480</b>	<b>306</b>	<b>491</b>	<b>366</b>	<b>231</b>	<b>344</b>

Eighty Percent (80%) agreement with each individual item is the performance goal that has currently been set by the Court. The following tables are based on the total responses received throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit in 2007<sup>5</sup>, 2010 and 2013. The charts represent the percent agreement with each of the respective items, indicating that participants responded either "Agree" or "Strongly Agree." Responses recorded as "Not Applicable" ("N/A") or missing are excluded from the analysis of that particular item. Main Courthouse responses are presented collectively, rather than based on the entrance that participants exited the facility (e.g., North Entrance, Annex, Babcox Center).

Section I: Access to the Court						
Circuit Court of Lake County – Percent Agreement All Respondents						
Item	Statement	2007	2010	2013	Change 2010-13	Change 2007-13
1	Finding the courthouse was easy.	83.0%	86.7%	86.1%	-0.6%	+3.1%
2	The forms I needed were clear and easy to understand.	79.6%	77.4%	83.0%	+5.6%	+3.4%
3	I felt safe in the courthouse.	88.7%	91.2%	91.9%	+0.7%	+3.2%
4	The court makes reasonable efforts to remove physical and language barriers to services.	78.1%	83.3%	83.7%	+0.4%	+5.6%
5	I was able to get my court business done in a reasonable amount of time.	71.3%	69.9%	80.3%	+10.4%	+9.0%
6	Court staff paid attention to my needs.	78.3%	80.6%	81.6%	+1.0%	+3.3%
7	I was treated with courtesy and respect by court staff.	83.5%	86.1%	90.0%	+3.9%	+6.5%
8	I easily found the courtroom or office I needed.	85.3%	86.1%	90.0%	+3.9%	+4.7%
9	The court's website was useful.	57.6%	56.2%	72.7%	+16.5%	+15.1%
10	The court's hours of operation made it easy for me to do my business.	75.0%	80.5%	80.7%	+0.2%	+5.7%

<sup>5</sup> For a complete review of the September 2007 Access & Fairness Survey of the 19<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit see: Krause, R.A. (2008). *Public Perceptions of the Accessibility and Fairness of the Circuit Court of Lake County, Illinois*. Unpublished Document: Institute for Court Management, Court Executive Development Program - Phase III Project, May 2008.

<http://contentdm.ncsconline.org/cgi-bin/showfile.exe?CISOROOT=/ctcomm&CISOPTR=90>

Section II: Fairness						
Circuit Court of Lake County – Percent Agreement All Respondents						
Item	Statement	2007	2010	2013	Change 2010-13	Change 2007-13
11	The way my case was handled was fair.	73.5%	69.8%	78.2%	+8.4%	+4.7%
12	The judge listened to my side of the story before he or she made a decision.	70.4%	68.8%	80.7%	+1.9%	+10.3%
13	The judge had the information necessary to make a good decision about my case.	75.5%	72.7%	83.0%	+10.3%	+7.5%
14	I was treated the same as everyone else	78.9%	76.0%	85.2%	+9.2%	+6.3%
15	As I leave court, I know what to do next about my case.	82.2%	82.9%	85.0%	+2.1%	+2.8%

Section I: Access to the Court						
Circuit Court of Lake County – Percent Agreement Main Courthouse						
Item	Statement	2007	2010	2013	Change 2010-13	Change 2007-13
1	Finding the courthouse was easy.	87.3%	84.6%	85.9%	+1.3%	-1.4%
2	The forms I needed were clear and easy to understand.	77.3%	75.8%	84.0%	+8.2%	+6.7%
3	I felt safe in the courthouse.	86.8%	88.9%	93.2%	+4.3%	+6.4%
4	The court makes reasonable efforts to remove physical and language barriers to services.	75.1%	77.7%	82.3%	+4.6%	+7.2%
5	I was able to get my court business done in a reasonable amount of time.	65.4%	62.2%	79.6%	+17.4%	+14.2%
6	Court staff paid attention to my needs.	71.9%	78.5%	82.1%	+3.6%	+10.2%
7	I was treated with courtesy and respect by court staff.	82.0%	85.0%	91.6%	+6.6%	+9.6%
8	I easily found the courtroom or office I needed.	82.8%	78.8%	87.4%	+8.6%	+4.6%
9	The court's website was useful.	58.2%	63.0%	78.7%	+15.7%	+20.5%
10	The court's hours of operation made it easy for me to do my business.	72.5%	78.9%	83.4%	+4.5%	+10.9%

Section II: Fairness						
Circuit Court of Lake County – Percent Agreement Main Courthouse						
Item	Statement	2007	2010	2013	Change 2010-13	Change 2007-13
11	The way my case was handled was fair.	67.3%	59.8%	77.9%	+18.1%	+10.6%
12	The judge listened to my side of the story before he or she made a decision.	63.4%	66.7%	82.3%	+15.6%	+18.9%
13	The judge had the information necessary to make a good decision about my case.	69.4%	70.3%	83.6%	+13.3%	+14.2%
14	I was treated the same as everyone else	73.2%	70.5%	85.6%	+15.1%	+12.4%
15	As I leave court, I know what to do next about my case.	80.6%	80.2%	85.7%	+5.5%	+5.1%

## **Conclusions:**

In general, the results of the Access and Fairness Survey appeared to be quite positive and were well-received by both judges and court administration. Several recommendations followed the release of the 2007 Access and Fairness Survey results included:

- a review of signage to and within the court facilities,
- improving case management practices to expedite cases through the legal process, and
- implementing customer service training for court employees who have direct contact with court users.

Comparison of the results from 2007 and 2010 indicate that these efforts had some positive impacts on the perceptions of court customers who participated in the survey. The results also suggest that further improvements to accessibility can be made in the areas of court forms development (item 2), reducing the amount of time for consumers to conduct court business (item 5), and the usefulness of the court's website (item 9).

Prior to the 2010 Access and Fairness Survey, a Court Forms Group, composed of judges, court staff, and key stakeholders, was created in order to reduce the redundancy among court forms used by the Nineteenth Judicial Circuit and to make the forms themselves more accessible and easier to use for court customers. This group has been meeting on a regular basis and has made significant progress in examining and prioritizing the Court's most frequently used forms. The Division of Judicial Operations has identified the Court Forms Project as a division project through the SMAART Performance Management Program. Initial project outcomes anticipated in 2011 include: a reduction in the number of existing court forms, reductions in copying and reproduction costs, and reducing the amount of time consumers spend conducting court business.

Following the 2007 survey, the Division of Judicial Information and Technology initiated planned efforts at redesigning and revitalizing the Court's public website in order to produce a more user-friendly and helpful product for court customers. This project was completed in November 2009. The 2010 Access and Fairness Survey results indicate that there was no negligible difference in the perceptions of court users in this area; and although in 2013 these results improved greatly, the positive response rate was still below the established performance goal. The Division of Judicial Information and Technology is currently examining what fine improvements can be made to enhance the website for various user groups. Related to this effort are active marketing efforts of the website by all court divisions and the judiciary to the community as an information resource. These plans include adding the website address to all official letterhead, correspondence, and business cards, as well as sending mailers to schools and community groups.

The 2013 results are currently being reviewed by the Circuit and Associate Judges, as well as the Senior Management Team, to select additional items to address, especially those in the area of Fairness. One of the challenges that exist for the judiciary, and for the administrative office, is how to balance an accessible and expeditious court system with one that is perceived to be fair and equitable by all participants. Consequently, all results of the Access and Fairness Survey are under constant consideration for further improvements in order to better serve the public in a more efficient and fair manner. In keeping with the Nineteenth Judicial Circuit's Strategic Planning Model, the Access and Fairness Survey will continue to be conducted on a triennial basis in order to measure progress made by the court over time, and to compare its results with those of similar courts in other locations. The next court-wide Access and Fairness Survey is currently being planned for 2016.



## ACCESS AND FAIRNESS SURVEY

*On behalf of the judges and staff of the Circuit Court of Lake County, THANK YOU for participating in this survey.  
Your completion of this survey will help us to improve services.*

### I. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. What type of case brought you to the courthouse today?	2. How often have you been in this courthouse? <i>(Choose the closest estimate)</i>	3. In what year were you born?	4. What is your gender?
<input type="checkbox"/> Traffic <input type="checkbox"/> Criminal <input type="checkbox"/> Civil Matter <input type="checkbox"/> Divorce, Child Custody, or Support <input type="checkbox"/> Juvenile Matter <input type="checkbox"/> Probate <input type="checkbox"/> Small Claims <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____	<input type="checkbox"/> First time in this courthouse <input type="checkbox"/> Two to five (2 – 5) times <input type="checkbox"/> Six to ten (6 – 10) times <input type="checkbox"/> Eleven (11) or more times	<input type="checkbox"/> After 2001 <input type="checkbox"/> 1983 - 2001 <input type="checkbox"/> 1965 - 1982 <input type="checkbox"/> 1946 - 1964 <input type="checkbox"/> 1929 - 1945 <input type="checkbox"/> Before 1929	<input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female
		5. Have you ever used the court's website?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

*Using the scale below, please tell us how much you agree with the following statements by circling the appropriate number:*

II. ACCESS TO THE COURT	Disagree Strongly	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	N/A
1) Finding the courthouse or court facility was easy.	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
2) The forms I used were clear and easy to understand.	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
3) I felt safe in the courthouse or court facility.	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
4) The court made reasonable efforts to remove any physical or language barriers to the services I received today. <i>(If not applicable, please mark N/A)</i>	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
5) I was able to get my court business done in a reasonable amount of time.	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
6) Court staff paid attention to my needs.	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
7) I was treated with courtesy and respect by court staff.	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
8) I easily found the courtroom or office I needed.	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
9) The court's website was useful. <i>(If not used, please mark N/A)</i>	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
10) The court's hours of operation made it easy for me to do my business.	1	2	3	4	5	n/a

*Please complete questions 11-15 only if you were a party to a legal matter and appeared before a judge today.*

III. FAIRNESS	Disagree Strongly	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	N/A
11) The way my case was handled was fair.	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
12) The judge listened to my side of the story before he or she made a decision.	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
13) The judge had the information necessary to make good decisions about my case.	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
14) I was treated the same as everyone else.	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
15) As I leave the court, I know what to do next about my case.	1	2	3	4	5	n/a

### IV. Please share with us any additional comments or observations regarding your court experience.



## ENCUESTA DE ACCESO E IGUALDAD

*Los jueces y el personal del Circuito Judicial Decimonoveno le AGRADECEN por participar en esta encuesta.*

*Al completar esta encuesta usted nos ayudará a mejorar nuestros servicios.*

### I. DATOS GENERALES

1. ¿Qué tipo de caso lo trajo al tribunal hoy?	2. ¿Con qué frecuencia ha estado usted en este tribunal? <i>(Elija la estimación más cercana)</i>	3. ¿En qué año nació?	4. ¿Cuál es su género?
<input type="checkbox"/> Tráfico <input type="checkbox"/> Penal <input type="checkbox"/> Cuestión Civil <input type="checkbox"/> Divorcio, custodia infantil o pensión alimenticia <input type="checkbox"/> Cuestión de Menores <input type="checkbox"/> Testamentaria <input type="checkbox"/> Pequeñas Reclamaciones <input type="checkbox"/> Otro: _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Primera vez en el tribunal <input type="checkbox"/> Dos a cinco (2 – 5) veces <input type="checkbox"/> Seis a Diez (6 – 10) veces <input type="checkbox"/> Once (11) o más veces	<input type="checkbox"/> Despues del 2001 <input type="checkbox"/> 1983 - 2001 <input type="checkbox"/> 1965 - 1982 <input type="checkbox"/> 1946 - 1964 <input type="checkbox"/> 1929 - 1945 <input type="checkbox"/> Antes de 1929	<input type="checkbox"/> Masculino <input type="checkbox"/> Femenino
		5. ¿Alguna vez ha usado la página del tribunal en la Internet?	<input type="checkbox"/> Sí <input type="checkbox"/> No

*Usando la escala abajo mencionada, por favor clasifique su aprobación a las siguientes declaraciones circulando el número apropiado:*

II. ACCESO AL TRIBUNAL	Desapribo Completamente	Desapribo	Neutral	Apriego	Apriego Completamente	N/A
1) Fue fácil encontrar el tribunal.	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
2) Los formularios que usé fueron claros y fáciles de entender.	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
3) Me sentí seguro en la Corte y en el tribunal.	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
4) El tribunal realizó esfuerzos razonables para eliminar cualquier barrera física y de lenguaje en los servicios que recibí hoy. <i>(Si no es aplicable, por favor marque N/A)</i>	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
5) Logré cumplir con mis asuntos en el tribunal en un tiempo razonable.	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
6) El personal del tribunal respondió atentamente a mis necesidades.	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
7) El personal me trató con cortesía y respeto.	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
8) Encontré con facilidad la sala del tribunal y la oficina que necesitaba.	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
9) La página del tribunal en la Internet fue útil. <i>(Si no fue usada, por favor marque N/A)</i>	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
10) El horario de las horas de operación del tribunal facilitó el cumplimiento de mis asuntos.	1	2	3	4	5	n/a

*Por favor complete preguntas 11-15 sólo si usted fue parte de una cuestión legal y compareció ante un juez hoy.*

III. IMPARCIALIDAD	Desapribo Completamente	Desapribo	Neutral	Apriego	Apriego Completamente	N/A
11) Mi caso fue tratado en una forma justa.	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
12) El juez escuchó mi versión de los hechos antes de que él/ella tomara una decisión.	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
13) El juez tenía toda la información necesaria para tomar una buena decisión con respecto a mi caso.	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
14) Se me trató igual que los demás.	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
15) Al salir del tribunal, sé que hacer a continuación con respecto a mi caso.	1	2	3	4	5	n/a

### IV. Por favor comparta con nosotros cualquier comentario/observación adicional en lo que se refiere a su experiencia en el tribunal.