

**STRATEGIC PLAN OF
THE CITY AND PARISH COURTS
2012-2016**

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Adopted

February 2012

Strategic Plan for the City and Parish Courts

Preface:

The Strategic Plan of the City and Parish Courts has been developed to assist the city and parish courts and their judges in their continuing efforts to improve the administration of justice.

The goals, objectives, and strategies contained in the Plan shall not be used as a basis for litigation or sanctions or penalties. Nothing in these goals, objectives, and strategies alters or detracts from existing disciplinary codes or alters the existing standards of conduct against which judicial misconduct may be determined.

Mission Statement:

The mission of the city and parish courts of Louisiana is to provide access to justice, to meet all responsibilities in a timely and expeditious manner, to provide equality, fairness and integrity in their proceedings, to maintain judicial independence and accountability, and to reach a fair and just result by adherence to the procedural and substantive law, thereby instilling trust and confidence in the public.

Goal 1.0 To establish a more open and accessible system of justice.

Objectives:

1.1 To conduct judicial proceedings that are public by law or custom openly.

Strategies:

1.1(a). Promulgation of Court Schedules. Each city and parish court should notify the public of court schedules through various means, including notices on bulletin boards, voice response telephone messaging, use of web sites, or other means.

1.2 To encourage responsible parties to make court facilities safe, accessible, and convenient.

Strategies:

1.2(a) Courthouse Security Audits. Each city and parish court should commission the federal marshal's office or state or local law enforcement officials to conduct security audits and tests of courthouse facilities; and each court should communicate the results of such audits and tests to the Judicial Administrator of the Supreme Court and to appropriate local officials.

1.2(b) Survey of Opinion on Security. Each city and parish court should conduct periodic surveys of the opinions of court personnel, lawyers, and litigants regarding court security; and

each court should communicate the results of such surveys to the Judicial Administrator of the Supreme Court and to appropriate local officials.

1.2(c) Emergency Procedures. Each city and parish court should develop and promulgate a continuity of operations/disaster recovery plan outlining procedures for dealing with emergencies in the courtroom and judges' chambers as well as public health emergencies, storms, or power outages which affect the entire court, unless such procedures are already in place for the courthouse as a whole; and each court should regularly train its employees in the use of such procedures. The plan should include procedures for protecting court data in the event of any emergency affecting court operations.

1.2(d) Telephone Accuracy and Courtesy. Each city and parish court should train its employees to answer phones courteously and to provide accurate information.

1.2(e) ADA Accessibility. Each city and parish court should commission an audit of ADA accessibility; and each court should communicate the results of the audit to the Judicial Administrator of the Supreme Court and to appropriate local officials. Based on the results of the audit, each court should develop and implement appropriate policies and procedures to ensure ADA accessibility.

1.2(f) Survey of Opinion on Accessibility. Each city and parish court should conduct periodic surveys of the opinions of court personnel, lawyers, and litigants regarding accessibility; and each court should communicate the results of such surveys to the Judicial Administrator of the Supreme Court and to appropriate local officials.

1.3 To give all who appear before the court reasonable opportunities to participate effectively without undue hardship or inconvenience.

Strategies:

1.3(a) Interpreters. Each city and parish court should conduct a study of the community in which it is located for the purpose of identifying the various languages spoken in that community as well as alternative methods of communication used by the hearing or cognitively impaired in the community.—The court should establish an interpreter pool made up of English-speaking persons who are also proficient in those languages or alternative methods of communication and who are willing to serve as interpreters for the court. The court should also provide instruction for members of the interpreter pool on the proper protocol for simultaneous interpretation in the courtroom as well as the policies and procedures of the court regarding the use of interpreters. The court should also establish a fee policy for interpreters and a procedure for prompt payment.

1.3(b) Rules on Programmatic Participation. Each city and parish court should enact and promulgate rules or policies providing for effective programmatic participation in the processes of the court by persons with limited English proficiency and by persons with disabilities.

1.4 To ensure that all judges and other court personnel are courteous and responsive to the public and accord respect to all with whom they come into contact.

Strategies:

1.4(a) Civility and Professionalism Training. City and parish judges, individually and/or through the Louisiana City Judges Association, the Louisiana Judicial College, and other organizations, should continue to sponsor training in civility and professionalism for judges and court personnel.

1.4(b) Code of Professionalism. Each city and parish court should display or otherwise make available to the public copies of the Supreme Court's Code of Professionalism, as both a pledge and reminder of the responsibilities of judges to professionalism.

1.4(c) Public Problem Resolution Process. Each city and parish court should establish a public problem resolution process. The public problem resolution process should only address the problems that a member of the public is having with either the court as a whole or with a particular court employee. The process should not address the problems that a member of the public is having with a particular judge. Such problems should only be handled through the Judiciary Commission. The information obtained from such processes should be used by each court not only to address specific user complaints but also to improve customer services and user-friendliness.

1.4(d) Court Users' Assessment of Courtesy and Responsiveness. Each city and parish court should conduct periodic surveys of regular court users, including court employees, attorneys, probation officers, and to assess the users' perceptions of the courtesy and responsiveness of court personnel. On the basis of such information, each court should develop, implement, and maintain ways to improve customer services and user-friendliness.

1.4(e) Judicial Mentoring Program. City and parish judges, individually and/or through the Louisiana City Judges Association, should sponsor and support a Judicial Mentoring Program to assist new judges in the performance of their duties.

1.4(f) Judicial Training. City and parish judges, individually and/or through the Louisiana Judicial Council and all judicial associations, should maintain and improve the availability and quality of continuing legal education and judicial training within the state.

1.4(g) Judge-to-Judge Exchanges. City and parish judges, individually and/or through the Louisiana City Judges Association and the Louisiana Judicial College, with assistance from the Supreme Court, should develop more programs that would enable Louisiana judges to exchange ideas with judges from other states.

1.5 To encourage all responsible public bodies and public officers to make the costs of access to the court's proceedings and records -- whether measured in terms of money, time, or the

procedures that must be followed -- reasonable, fair, and affordable.

Strategies:

1.5(a) Inventory of Assistance Alternatives for the Financially Disadvantaged. Each city and parish court should encourage local bar associations to conduct a study or inventory of the assistance alternatives available for the financially disadvantaged and should encourage them to develop and implement ways for helping financially disadvantaged litigants to access such assistance.

1.5(b) Civil Legal Assistance. Each city and parish court should work with the Access to Justice Committee of the Louisiana State Bar Association to continually improve the availability and quality of civil legal services for the financially disadvantaged.

1.5(c) Indigent Defense. Each city and parish judge, individually and through the Louisiana City Judges Association, should work with district indigent defender boards, local indigent defender boards, and the Louisiana Indigent Defense Assistance Board (LIDAB) to continuously improve the availability and quality of indigent defender services in each area of the state.

1.5(d) Pro Se Litigation. The Louisiana City Judges Association, with assistance from the Judicial Administrator of the Supreme Court and perhaps under the auspices of the Judicial Council, should develop and adopt a comprehensive policy statement containing recommended guidelines for the use of *pro se* representation in city and parish courts, as well as standard forms to assist *pro se* litigants. Once developed, the policy statement should provide the basis for the development and implementation of a comprehensive *pro se* litigation program throughout the state.

1.5(e) Victim Assistance. Each city and parish court, with assistance from the Judicial Administrator of the Supreme Court, should develop, implement and maintain effective ways to communicate court processes to victims of crime and to alleviate, to the extent possible, the burden of attending court processes.

Goal 2.0 To meet all responsibilities to everyone affected by the court and its activities in a timely and expeditious manner.

Objectives:

2.1 To encourage timely case management and processing.

Strategies:

2.1(a) Manual Case Management Systems. Each city and parish court should develop, implement and maintain, with assistance from the Supreme Court, manual case management systems using checklists, docket masters, and other manual tools to track the timeliness of cases.

2.1(b) Automated Case Management Information Systems. Each city and parish court should develop, implement, and maintain, with assistance from the Supreme Court, automated case management systems for the scheduling and tracking of cases, for managing continuances and other sources of case delay.

2.1(c) Case Management Techniques. Each city and parish court should develop, implement, and maintain, with assistance from the Supreme Court, effective case management techniques, such as time-certain scheduling, pre-trial conferences, readiness calls and conferences, differentiated case management, time standards and other such tools for reducing delay and expediting case processing.

2.1(d) Certainty of Trial Dates. Each city and parish court should evaluate the frequency with which cases scheduled for trial are actually heard when scheduled. On the basis of such information, each court should develop techniques for continuously improving the certainty of trial dates.

2.1(e) Child Abuse and Neglect Cases. Each city and parish court exercising jurisdiction over child abuse and neglect cases should develop, implement, and maintain effective case management techniques for improving the timeliness and quality of child abuse and neglect adjudication in the state. Each court should evaluate the utility and appropriateness of such techniques as time-certain scheduling, pre-trial conferences, readiness calls and conferences, differentiated case management, and other tools for reducing delay and expediting case processing. Each court should investigate all available resources, including assistance by the Louisiana Supreme Court and the Louisiana Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges.

2.1(f) Punctual Commencement of Court Proceedings. Each city and parish court should develop, implement and maintain techniques for ensuring the punctual commencement of all court proceedings.

2.2 To provide required reports and to respond to requests for information promptly.

Strategies:

2.2(a) Reporting Response. Each city and parish court should develop, implement, and maintain a system of providing required reports and requests for information prior to any required deadlines and, generally, within one work week of a request for information or receipt of a notice of a required report.

2.3 To promptly implement changes in the law and procedure.

Strategies:

2.3(a) Implementation of Changes of Law and Procedure. Each city and parish court, perhaps with assistance from the Judicial Administrator of the Supreme Court, should adopt a procedure for tracking all changes in law and legal procedure, for notifying all judges of said changes, and for implementing all changes uniformly and systematically.

2.3(b) Implementation of ASFA. All judges exercising juvenile jurisdiction should be aware of the requirements of the Louisiana Children's Code with respect to the federal Adoption and Safe Families Act and should be properly trained and motivated to meet such requirements.

2.3(c) Restructuring FINS. Each court that handles FINS cases should take all steps to ensure that the services being provided by FINS are effective and efficient.

2.3(d) Anticipating Needed Changes. Each city and parish court should consider ways to identify trends and to anticipate new conditions that might require or suggest a need for adjustments in the operations of the court, such as-dedicated specialty courts.

Goal 3.0 To provide due process and equal protection of the law to all who have business before the court; and to demonstrate integrity in all procedures and decisions.

Objectives:

3.1 To encourage city courts that exercise juvenile jurisdiction to make strategic decisions that support the best outcomes for children and families.

Strategies:

3.1(a). Convenience and stability for child parties. City and parish courts exercising juvenile jurisdiction should make decisions about that exercise of jurisdiction that take into account the needs of the child, attorneys, other parties, and state workers, in an effort to provide continuity and stability in the handling of those cases.

3.1(b) Ongoing specialized education and training. City and parish courts exercising juvenile jurisdiction should participate in specialized training and education for the type of jurisdiction exercised. This education and training should be ongoing and make use of all available resources including, but not limited, to the juvenile bench book, juvenile law experts, online and in-person training seminars and related materials, and informational websites.

3.1(c) Representation. City and parish courts exercising juvenile jurisdiction should ensure appropriate representation for children and should comply with counsel appointment rules.

3.1(d) Case management. City and parish courts exercising juvenile jurisdiction should oversee the management of juvenile cases, including docketing, hearing dates, and the form and substance of court orders.

3.1(e) Technology. City and parish courts exercising juvenile jurisdiction should use existing and emerging technologies wherever possible to enhance outcomes for children and families.

3.1(f) Emergency planning. City and parish courts should place a high priority on at-risk children on specialized dockets in continuity of operations/emergency plans.

3.2 To faithfully adhere to laws, procedural rules, and established policies.

Strategies:

3.2(a) Attorney Focus Groups or Panels. Each city and parish court should consider organizing attorney focus groups to solicit feedback on the court's faithful adherence to laws, procedural rules, and established policies, especially with respect to review and decision-making on motions, the imposition of sanctions, the enforcement of policies on continuances, the enforcement of court orders, the process for appointment of counsel, the setting of bail, the award of costs and attorney fees, advisement of rights, proper boykinization, the quality of orders and judgments, and the extent of the notification of the right to appeal. Each court should use the information and feedback from such focus groups or panels to make needed changes.

3.2(b) Questionnaire on Fidelity to Law. Each city and parish court should consider circulating a questionnaire to court employees and attorneys measuring their opinions on the court's compliance with law and court rules. On the basis of such information, each court should further examine its rules and procedures and, if necessary, should make necessary corrections.

3.3 To give individual attention to cases, deciding them without undue disparity among like cases and upon legally relevant factors.

Strategies:

3.3(a) Attorney Focus Groups or Panels. Each city and parish court should consider using the attorney focus groups or panels recommended in Strategy 3.1(a) to also solicit feedback on the court's equality and fairness in the treatment of attorneys, litigants, and other users of the court. Each court should use the information and feedback from such focus groups or panels to make needed changes.

3.4 To ensure that the decisions of the court address clearly the issues presented to it and, where appropriate, to specify how compliance can be achieved.

Strategies:

3.4(a) Attorney Focus Groups or Panels. Each city and parish court should use the attorney focus groups or panels recommended in Strategy 3.1(a) and 3.2(a) to also solicit attorney feedback on the clarity of orders and judgments in criminal and civil cases. Each court should use the information and feedback from such focus groups or panels to make needed changes.

3.5 To ensure that appropriate responsibility is taken for the enforcement of court orders.

Strategies:

3.5(a) Clarity and Interpretation of Judgments and Sentences. Each city and parish court should use questionnaires or other measures to determine the level of compliance with court orders relating to fines, court costs, restitution, and other orders relating to probationers, as well as those orders and judgments relating to the enforcement of civil judgments and the enforcement of case processing rules. The court should use the results of the analysis to determine the level of compliance with its orders and, if necessary to make improvements thereto.

3.5(b) Attorney Focus Groups or Panels. Each city and parish court should use the attorney focus groups or panels recommended in Strategy 3.1(a), 3.2(a) and 3.3(a) to also solicit attorney feedback on the level of compliance with the court's orders and judgments in criminal, civil, and other cases. Each court should use the information and feedback from such focus groups or panels to make needed changes.

3.6 To ensure that all court records of relevant court decisions and actions are accurate and preserved properly.

Strategies:

3.6(a) Accuracy and Preservation of Records. Each city and parish court should identify ways to standardize and ensure the accuracy of court information and should identify effective ways of storing, retrieving, and preserving court records.

Goal 4.0 To maintain judicial independence, while observing the principle of comity in its governmental relations and accountability to the public.

Objectives:

4.1 To maintain the constitutional independence of the judiciary while observing the principle of cooperation with other branches of government.

Strategies:

4.1(a) Executive/Legislative Branch Coordination. All city and parish judges, individually and through the Louisiana City Judges Association and the Louisiana Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, should continue to communicate, coordinate, and cooperate with the legislative and executive branches on all matters relating to judicial resource needs.

4.2 To seek, use and account for public resources in a responsible manner.

Strategies:

4.2(a) Proper Staffing. City and parish courts should ensure that they employ a sufficient number of properly-trained staff, including secretaries, law clerks, minute clerks, disposition clerks, court reporters, and other necessary staff members, to support and facilitate judicial adjudicative and administrative functions.

4.2(b) Succession Planning. City and parish courts should ensure continuity of operations through proper workforce succession planning. This planning should provide for the development of individuals for key staff positions, to avoid the loss of knowledge as staff retire or change positions.

4.2(c) Judicial Accounting and Financial Control. Each city and parish court, to the extent feasible, should develop general guidelines for managing funds under its control, including judicial expense funds and operational funds accounts. When developing these guidelines, courts should incorporate best practices in accounting and financial control and consider the propriety of certain expenditures and the use of fair procurement procedures.

4.2(d) Legal Resources. All city and parish court judges should ensure that they and their support staff have sufficient access to published and automated legal resources to facilitate judicial adjudicative and administrative functions.

4.2(e) Judicial Budget and Performance Accountability. The Louisiana City Judges Association and all city and parish court judges should continue to develop, maintain, and expand the Judicial Budget and Performance Accountability Program as a means of improving aspects of court performance to the extent permitted by their respective facilities, personnel, and financing.

4.2(f) Performance Audits. The Louisiana City Judges Association and all city and parish court judges should cooperate with and provide assistance to the performance audits commissioned by the Judicial Administrator of the Supreme Court as part of the Judicial Budget and Performance Accountability Program.

4.2(g) Improving the Court System. Representatives from the Louisiana City Judges Association should continue to participate actively in initiatives that may be undertaken by the Judicial Administrator of the Supreme Court, and/or the Judicial Council, to examine and explore ways to monitor and improve the court system.

4.2(h) Costs of Court Proceedings. All city and parish courts should become proactive in efforts to reduce or control the costs of civil filing fees and criminal court costs that are not related to court functions.

4.3 To use fair employment practices; and to train and develop the court's human resources.

Strategies:

4.3(a) Human Resource Policies. All city and parish courts should develop, promulgate, and enforce fair employment policies as required by law and by good human resource management practices. Such policies should address harassment, the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Family Leave Act, the Fair Labor Standards Act, and all civil rights acts.

4.4 To inform the community of the court's structure, function, and programs.

Strategies:

4.4(a) Public Outreach and Community Relations. The Louisiana City Judges Association and each city and parish court should develop, in association with the Community Relations Department of the Judicial Administrator of the Supreme Court effective, inexpensive strategies to inform the community of each court's structure, function, and programs. These strategies should include emerging technologies such as interactive court websites and social media.

4.5 To recognize new conditions or emerging events and to adjust court operations as necessary.

Strategies:

4.5(a) Court Technology. City and parish judges, individually and/or through the Louisiana City Judges Association and the Louisiana Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, with assistance from the Judicial Administrator of the Supreme Court, should continue to develop and update a master plan for court technology in city and parish courts. The master plan should identify needed technologies, analyze the costs and benefits of alternative technologies, identify and analyze barriers to the use of such technologies, and make recommendations for overcoming barriers and implementing, over time, each new technology.

4.5(b) Emerging Technology. All city and parish courts should consider using emerging technologies such as interactive court websites and social media to expand court services, enhance community outreach, publicize newsworthy events, and communicate with staff and the public as part of a court's emergency plan.

4.5(c) Uniform Court Rules and Forms. City and parish judges, individually and/or through the Louisiana City Judges Association, should endorse and support efforts to develop uniform rules and standard forms, if applicable.

4.5(d) Comprehensive Continuum of Children's Services. City and parish judges, individually and/or through the Louisiana City Judges Association and the Louisiana Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges should support the Governor's Children's Cabinet as it develops and implements a comprehensive continuum of children's services in Louisiana.

Goal 5.0 To instill public trust and confidence in the public.

Objectives:

5.1 To ensure that the court and the justice it renders are accessible and are perceived by the public to be accessible.

Strategies:

See Strategies 1.2(a) through 1.5(e).

5.2 To ensure that the court functions fairly, impartially, and expeditiously, and is perceived by the public to be so.

Strategies:

See Strategies 2.1(a) through 3.6(a).

5.3 To ensure that the court is independent, cooperative with other components of government, and accountable, and is perceived by the public to be so.

Strategies:

See Strategies 4.1(a) through 4.5(d).

External Factors That May Affect the Ability of the City and Parish Courts to Implement This Plan

The Strategic Plan of the City and Parish Courts is intended to provide motivation, guidance, and continuity to the individual and collective efforts of Louisiana's city and parish courts to improve their performance. Because the Plan addresses the city and parish courts as a whole without reference to each court's unique problems, conditions, limitations, and opportunities, each city and parish court is not expected to implement every strategy in the Plan. Each city and parish court, however, is expected to use the Plan as a guide for addressing those problems and seizing those opportunities for improvement that affect their respective courts.

There are several external factors that may negatively affect the ability of the city and parish courts to address those problems and seize those opportunities for improvement implied in the Plan. Among these factors are:

1. Part-Time and Full-Time Judges. All five of the parish court judges are legally required to work full-time, but only about seventeen of the sixty-nine city court judges have legally-mandated, full-time responsibilities. In the most recent survey conducted as part of the strategic planning process, thirty-four of the city court judges considered that they worked full-time; the remainder, thirty-five judges, acknowledged that they did in fact work only part-time.

2. Lack of Staff. Of the forty-nine city and parish courts responding to the employee question on the most recent survey conducted as part of the strategic planning process, only three reported having eighty or more employees (Baton Rouge - 145 employees; New Orleans Traffic Court - 104 employees; and Shreveport - 80 employees). Five courts (Hammond; Houma; the First and Second Parish Courts of Jefferson; Lafayette) reported having between 20 and 35 employees; four courts (Alexandria; Bossier City; Opelousas; and Slidell) reported having between 10 and 19 employees; sixteen courts reported having between 5 and 9 employees; and twenty-one courts reporting having less than 5 employees. Because many of the personnel in the smaller courts are involved with their judges in the adjudicative functions of the court, there isn't always sufficient staff available to engage fully in many of the activities referenced in the Plan.

3. Reliance on Other Offices. The city and parish courts receive most of their operational funding from a combination of local governmental and self-generated revenues. In addition, local governments are generally responsible for all costs and requirements associated with building operation and maintenance. The parish courts rely on the parish clerk of court for record-keeping services, including minute clerks and sometimes court reporters. The parish and city courts generally rely on parish and municipal law enforcement functions to provide bailiff services and service of process. The courts also rely on attorneys from the city or parish attorney's office to provide competent and professional services.

4. Reliance on the Judicial Administrator of the Supreme Court. As can be seen in the Strategic Plan, some of the several adopted strategies rely on the assistance of the Judicial Administrator of the Supreme Court for their proper implementation. Depending on the responsibilities of the Judicial Administrator with respect to the similar assistance provided to the Supreme Court, the Courts of Appeal and the District Courts for the implementation of their

plans, the Plan's reliance on the Judicial Administrator may also be a potential barrier to implementation.

5. Variances in Court Funding. Courts are subject to the same economic conditions as the communities in which they are located. The ability of citizens to pay fines and fees directly impacts a court's ability to function; lack of funds may be a barrier to implementation of strategic plan strategies.

Performance Indicators for the City and Parish Courts

Goal 1.0 **To establish a more open and accessible system of justice**

Objective 1.5 **To encourage all responsible public bodies and public officers to make the costs of access to the court’s proceedings and records – whether measured in terms of money, time, or the procedures that must be followed – reasonable, fair, and affordable**

General Performance Information:	2009	2010	2011
Percentage of surveyed city/parish court chief judges indicating actions taken in FY 2010-2011 to assist pro se litigants	98.1%	100%	98.1%

Goal 2.0 **To meet all responsibilities to everyone affected by the court and its activities in a timely and expeditious manner**

Objective 2.1 **To encourage timely case management and processing**

General Performance Information:	2009	2010	2011
Percentage of surveyed city/parish court chief judges indicating that their court had taken steps in FY 2010-11 to reduce delays and improve the timeliness of case processing	94.2%	88.5%	90.4%

Goal 4.0 **To maintain judicial independence, while observing the principle of comity in its governmental relations and accountability to the public**

Objective 4.4 **To inform the community of the court’s structure, function, and programs**

General Performance Information:	2009	2010	2011
Percentage of surveyed city/parish court chief judges indicating that their court regularly provided public education and public outreach services in FY 2010-2011	94.2%	94.2%	90.4%

Objective 4.5 To recognize new conditions or emerging events and to adjust court operations as necessary

General Performance Information:	2009	2010	2011
Percentage of surveyed city/parish court chief judges indicating that their court had taken steps in FY 2010-2011 to improve employee training and development	92.3%	94.2%	90.4%
Percentage of surveyed city/parish court chief judges indicating that their court had taken action in FY 2010-2011 to install or implement technologies	94.2%	88.5%	90.4%