

**STRATEGIC PLAN OF
THE CITY AND PARISH COURTS
2017-2021**

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Adopted May 16, 2017

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In the spring of 2016, the City Judges Association formed a committee to develop the 2017-2021 Strategic Plan of the City and Parish Courts. The committee included judges and a court administrator. The committee developed and sent a survey to all of the city and parish judges to determine priorities for the plan. Twenty-nine of the seventy-three city and parish court judges responded to the survey online or during committee meetings. Using the priorities survey, the committee members developed the plan goals, objectives, and strategies. The plan also contains a mission statement, performance indicators for each objective, and a discussion of the factors external to the courts that may affect their ability to carry out the strategic plan.

The goals, objectives, and strategies contained in the Plan shall not be used as a basis for litigation, 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 of the public.

STATEMENT OF GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The goals and objectives of the city and parish courts for 2017-2021 are as follows:

GOAL I: ADVANCE JUDICIAL COMPETENCY

Objective 1.1: Enhance judicial competence

Objective 1.2: Uphold and promote judicial fairness, ethics, and professionalism

GOAL II: PROVIDE EFFICIENT, TRANSPARENT, AND TIMELY ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE

Objective 2.1: Deliver timely case management and processing

Objective 2.2: Promote access to justice

Objective 2.3: Be responsive to the special needs of victims, litigants, and other court users

- Objective 2.4: Provide training and professional development for court staff
- Objective 2.5: Fairly and consistently enforce judgments and orders of the court
- Objective 2.6: Provide for the safety and security of court staff, judges, and the public

GOAL III: INSTILL PUBLIC CONFIDENCE

- Objective 3.1: Be accountable for public resources
- Objective 3.2: Foster effective relationships with judicial partners - courts at all levels, local, regional, and state executive and legislative branch agencies, and others such as bar associations
- Objective 3.3: Strengthen communication with the public
- Objective 3.4: Promote understanding of the court's structure, function, and programs and the importance of judicial independence

GOAL I: ADVANCE JUDICIAL COMPETENCY

Enhance the ability of judges to decide cases fairly, impartially, and without outside influence. Promote continued growth and understanding of the developing areas of the law.

Objectives:

- 1.1 Enhance judicial competence
- 1.2 Uphold and promote judicial fairness, ethics, and professionalism

Strategies:

- Develop bench books and best practice materials
- Act as a mentor for new judges
- Attend judicial education seminars. Lead sessions or sit on panels when appropriate
- Attend judicial seminars on ethics and professionalism, leading sessions or participating on panels when appropriate
- Discuss recent developments in the law or administration of justice with colleagues and justice partners
- Participate in justice improvement committees
- Implement and promote the strategic plan
- Participate in judicial associations and other groups to share knowledge with judges, lawyers, and judicial partners
- Foster self-assessment through judicial and court performance surveys
- Promptly incorporate changes in the law into judicial and court procedures

Performance indicator: Percentage of surveyed city/parish court senior judges indicating that their court took positive action to enhance their own or general judicial competence

Performance indicator: Percentage of surveyed city/parish court senior judges indicating that their court took action to uphold and promote their own or general judicial fairness, ethics, and professionalism

GOAL II. PROVIDE EFFICIENT, TRANSPARENT, AND TIMELY ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE

Increase knowledge and ability in the areas of court administration and case management, and facilitate access to the court for all who wish to participate in the judicial process

Objectives and Strategies:

- 2.1 Deliver timely case management and processing
- Implement and/or upgrade case management systems
 - Improve procedures such as docketing and scheduling
 - Use technology, such as websites, remote access to court records, and remote payment access, to make the court processes more convenient for the public
 - Implement time standards for case processing
 - Implement pre-trial conferences
 - Meet reporting deadlines to the Supreme Court and other justice agencies
 - Share information with other justice system agencies and partners whenever appropriate

** Performance Indicator: Percentage of surveyed city/parish court senior judges indicating that their court had taken steps to reduce delays and improve the timeliness of case processing*

** Performance indicator: Percentage of surveyed city/parish court senior judges indicating that their court had taken action to install or implement technologies*

- 2.2 Promote access to justice
- Provide self-help desks or kiosks
 - Direct litigants to low-cost legal service providers and websites that assist self-represented litigants; list resources and links on the court website
 - Direct litigants to recently-adopted city court forms
 - Provide plain language forms
 - Train court staff to answer questions without giving legal advice
 - Provide and publicize services for those with limited English proficiency
 - Regularly assess the accessibility of court facilities and procedures. As much as possible, upgrade and maintain accessible facilities
 - Provide for individuals with disabilities in emergency plans
 - Develop comprehensive, uniform procedures for indigents and those who request *in forma pauperis* status

** Performance indicator: Percentage of surveyed city/parish court senior judges indicating that their court took action to assist self-represented litigants*

- 2.3 Be responsive to the special needs of victims, litigants, and other court users
- Assess the need for/sponsor a problem-solving court – drug court, juvenile drug court, DWI court, mental health court, domestic violence court
 - Improve the timeliness and quality of child abuse and neglect cases
 - Train court staff on recognizing cases to be expedited
 - Investigate/develop community-based alternatives to fines and fees

Performance indicator: Percentage of surveyed city/parish court senior judges indicating that their court investigated or implemented community-based alternatives to fines and fees.

- 2.4 Provide training and professional development for court staff
- Develop a code of conduct for court employees
 - Provide education and opportunities for professional development to enhance court services and ensure succession of court leaders
 - Cross train employees
 - Encourage employees to apply customer service principles to court service

** Performance indicator: Percentage of surveyed city/parish court senior judges indicating that their court had taken steps to improve employee training and development*

- 2.5 Fairly and consistently enforce judgments and orders of the court
- Investigate/develop community-based alternatives to fines and fees
 - Develop comprehensive, uniform procedures for indigents and those who request *in forma pauperis* status
 - Use bench books and best practice materials to properly assess and collect fines, fees, and costs

Performance indicator: Percentage of surveyed city/parish court senior judges indicating that their court had reviewed all costs, fees, and fines assessed to ensure that each cost is authorized by statute and accurately assessed.

- 2.6 Provide for the safety and security of court staff, judges, and the public
- Update the Continuity of Operations/Disaster Recovery Plan (COOP/DRP)
 - Install and maintain safety measures such as limited access doors, security cameras, screening equipment, and safety procedures
 - Participate with other judicial partners in court security/emergency preparedness committees; implement changes recommended by those committees
 - As much as possible, upgrade and maintain facilities accessible to the public and include those with special needs in emergency procedures

Performance indicator: Percentage of surveyed city/parish court senior judges indicating that their court had reviewed and updated its COOP/DRP, if needed, to include those with special needs in emergency procedures.

GOAL III. INSTILL PUBLIC CONFIDENCE

Promote public understanding of the essential role of courts and judges, provide accountability for public resources, and foster relationships with the public, justice partners, and other branches of government

Objectives and Strategies:

- 3.1 Be accountable for public resources
- Update accounting systems
 - Monitor assessment and distribution of fines, costs, and fees
 - Publicize budgets and discuss needs with the community and appropriate justice system partners
 - Develop a financial plan and prioritize spending
 - Provide court services at the lowest possible cost

Performance indicator: Percentage of surveyed city/parish court senior judges indicating that their court took action to ensure accountability for public resources

- 3.2 Foster effective relationships with judicial partners - courts at all levels, local, regional, and state executive and legislative branch agencies, and others such as bar associations
- Organize and participate in committees of justice partners
 - Invite judicial partners to judges' meetings to discuss issues of mutual concern
 - Participate in meetings of other judicial associations or judicial partners
 - Sponsor meetings with members of other branches of government
 - Attend meetings of community and professional organizations
 - Sponsor and participate in judicial ride-alongs
 - Share information whenever appropriate to do so
 - Participate or sponsor training programs including other judicial partners

Performance indicator: Percentage of surveyed city/parish court senior judges indicating that their court initiated or strengthened relationships with judicial partners

- 3.3 Strengthen communication with the public
- Provide court information on the court website and other public media
 - Develop or update a policy to provide access to public records
 - Provide an information desk or staff person
 - Improve signage around the court
 - Provide statistics on court performance on the court website

Performance indicator: Percentage of surveyed city/parish court senior judges indicating that their court provided statistics on court performance on the court website

Performance indicator: Percentage of surveyed city/parish court senior judges indicating that their court assisted the public with directions or other information prior to or during their visit to the courthouse.

- 3.4 Promote understanding of the court's structure, function, and programs and the importance of judicial independence
- Volunteer to speak to community groups
 - Host community and school groups at the court
 - Sponsor mock trials or other law-related competitions
 - Hold Law Day activities
 - Place information in court public areas regarding the separation of powers and the role of the courts

** Performance indicator: Percentage of surveyed city/parish court senior judges indicating that their court regularly provided public education and public outreach services*

** Performance indicators that are required because they are used in the annual appropriations bill.*

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 sixteen of the sixty-eight city court judges have legally-mandated, full-time responsibilities.

2. Lack of Staff. Because many of the personnel in the city and parish courts are involved with their judges in the adjudicative functions of the court, sufficient staff isn't always available to engage fully in many of the activities referenced in the Plan.

3. Reliance on Other Offices. The city and parish courts are sensitive to, and dependent upon, the actions of local executive branch and law enforcement agencies. They 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 agencies to provide bailiff services and service of process. The courts also rely on attorneys from the city or parish attorney's office and indigent defender's office to provide competent and professional services. The city and parish courts are also affected by legislators and others in state government, who draft and pass legislation and control the appropriations process.

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 finite and limited resources of the Judicial Administrator's office, 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 local governing authorities to properly fund the city and/or parish courts, as well as 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.