

**STRATEGIC PLAN
OF THE LOUISIANA
STATE DISTRICT COURTS**

2015-2019



Approved October 2014

**A MESSAGE
FROM THE LOUISIANA DISTRICT JUDGES ASSOCIATION ON THE
STRATEGIC PLAN FOR THE DISTRICT COURTS
EFFECTIVE JANUARY 2015**

Dear Fellow Members of the Judiciary and Judicial Partners:

On behalf of the Louisiana District Judges Association's Strategic Planning Committee, and as approved by the Louisiana Supreme Court, we are pleased to present this Five-Year Strategic Plan for the Louisiana district courts. This plan represents our collective best effort to offer a serviceable and functional guide to all judicial officers who seek to effectively, efficiently and fiscally responsibly administer justice in Louisiana's district court system. As an accountable branch of government and a responsible steward of public funds, the Strategic Planning Committee recognized that a comprehensive strategic plan is essential to meet our goals and the public's expectations. Toward that end, this new strategic plan presents five campaigns with several and varied strategies following each campaign.

By way of background, the process of strategic planning began by statutory mandate in 1999 which required the Judicial Budgetary Control Board or a judicial body to be designated by the Supreme Court to develop on behalf of each level of court a strategic plan to be used as a guide to the ongoing and proposed activities of the judiciary for five years. The plan is intended to be used as a basic framework for the annual judicial appropriation bill. Pursuant to the statutory scheme set forth in La. R.S. 13:82, the plan will remain in effect for a five-year period, beginning January 1, 2015 through December 31, 2019.

The referenced statute requires the plan to contain, at a minimum, the following information:

- (1) A mission statement.
- (2) A statement of goals and objectives.
- (3) A statement of each strategy that shall be used to attain each goal and objective.
- (4) An identification of the potential external factors which are beyond the control of the judiciary and which could significantly affect the judiciary's attainment of its goals and objectives.
- (5) Performance indicators for each objective which, to the extent possible, shall include indicators of input, output, outcome and efficiency.

Guided only by this statutory provision and the perceived deficiencies in the prior five year strategic plan, our committee set to work. After lengthy discussions, frequent meetings, numerous draft revisions, and with expert assistance of professionals in the strategic planning discipline of court administration, a thorough overhaul of the previous plan took shape.

This plan provides an improved design, which can guide the proactive development and implementation, as well as the beginning and year-end performance measurement of inputs, outputs, and outcomes of our state trial courts. Our intent is the creation of a plan that judicial officers can use to drive the budget development, execution, performance assessment and improvement process. Our focus is on improvement and not merely compliance. The District

Courts intend to collaborate with the Supreme Court to develop a culture which encourages a virtuous cycle of development, competence, and sustainable improvement to our justice system.

This plan offers the following five long-term campaigns, which may guide our efforts to improve the efficiency, effectiveness, and fiscal responsibility of each district court for the next five years:

- Provide Adequate Access to Justice
- Develop Effective Communication
- Advance Judicial Competency
- Clarify and Define court Governance
- Affect Public Perception

Each campaign represents a component of our vision of transforming the courts of today into the courts of tomorrow. As we look ahead, we recognize that there will be many challenges. We know this because the pace of change continues with a swiftness beyond anything that we imagined when each of us began our work within the judiciary. Developments in science and technology are altering everything from criminal investigations and civil discovery to the presentation of evidence in the courtroom. The public expects greater access to information and increasingly attempts to navigate the court system without the assistance of legal counsel. These and other developments will place new demands on our courts. The strategies acknowledge those new demands but also recognize the uneven distribution of means across judicial districts. As such, we have attempted to offer multiple options for our varied district courts to achieve the goals of each campaign.

In addition, the district court strategic plan is designed to complement the Justice at Work program that is administered by the Supreme Court's Judicial Administrator. With this partnership, and in putting this plan into action, we hope to not only maintain but to enhance the collective trust and confidence that the public places in the Louisiana District Courts.

On behalf of the Strategic Planning Committee of the Louisiana District Judges Association, we thank everyone who shared their experiences and opinions to help create this Plan. We also thank the members of the Judicial Administrator's Office, Chief Justice Bernette Johnson, and all of the Associate Justices of the Supreme Court for their guidance and assistance. We look forward to working together to achieve the vision set forth in the pages that follow.



Judge Raymond S. Childress
2013-2014 LDJA President, Strategic Planning Committee Chair



Judge Jules D. Edwards, III
2014-2015 LDJA President

STRATEGIC PLAN OF THE LOUISIANA STATE DISTRICT COURTS

*Approved for Implementation by the Supreme Court
Upon Consideration on October 28, 2014*

Mission Statement

The mission of the district courts of Louisiana is to provide equal, effective, and efficient access to justice, to maintain judicial independence, competence, and accountability, to achieve fair and just results, and to inspire the trust and confidence of the public.

Statement of Goals and Objectives

The 2015-2019 Strategic Plan for the Louisiana District Courts includes five justice campaigns that not only recognize the uneven distributions of means across the judicial districts, but also the diverse ways the mission can be executed in each judicial district of our state. The strategies suggested for each justice campaign are designed to achieve the goal of the campaign. The five major justice campaigns are:

- Provide Adequate Access to Justice
- Develop Effective Communication
- Advance Judicial Competency
- Clarify and Define Court Governance
- Instill Public Confidence

I. Provide Adequate Access to Justice

Establish a more open and accessible system of justice for all litigants. This goal can be achieved by implementing or promoting the following strategies:

- Provide self-help kiosks, desks, and tools to provide legal information to litigants.
- Create and/or direct litigants to online resources where litigants can access legal information.
- Encourage pro-bono projects to provide advocacy services to the indigent.
- Provide special dockets for self-represented litigants.
- Encourage mentoring opportunities for young lawyers.
- Facilitate expedited jury trials.
- Identify opportunities to reduce litigation costs.
 - Develop uniform procedures for in forma pauperis (IFP) processing.
- Provide Limited English Proficiency (LEP) services.
- Provide plain language rules and forms.
- Solicit public input.

Suggested Resources

- CourtTools (www.courttools.org)
 - ✓ [*M1: Access and Fairness*](#)
- [NCSC - Center on Court Access to Justice for All](#)

II. Develop Effective Communication

Exchange ideas and convey information more effectively with judicial partners, within the court, and with the public. This goal can be achieved by improving communication in the following ways:

A. Improve Communication with Judicial Partners

- ✓ District Attorney
 - ✓ Sheriff
 - ✓ Clerk of Court
 - ✓ Public Defender
 - ✓ Probation and Parole
 - ✓ Local Government
 - ✓ State Legislature
 - ✓ Appellate Courts
 - ✓ Supreme Court
 - ✓ State Bar Association
 - ✓ Local Bar Association
 - ✓ Young Lawyers Section of the Bar
 - ✓ Louisiana District Judges Association'
 - ✓ Louisiana Center for Law & Civic Education
 - ✓ Others
- Organize one or more committees composed of representatives from these entities.
 - Establish regular meetings of the committee.
 - Seek input for discussion items for meetings.
 - Establish an email list of committee members to foster communication among the group.
 - Utilize the group to promote a spirit of cooperation among judicial partners.
 - Utilize the group to address and develop solutions to local obstacles to the administration of justice.
 - Solicit input from partners.
 - Invite local partners individually to attend the judges' meeting to discuss issues of concern.
 - Provide input to partners.
 - Communicate regularly with each local partner about any changes or developments within the court that may impact that partner.

B. Improve Communication within the Court

- Coordinate schedules and the use of resources.
- Set and attend regular en banc meetings.
- Create and distribute newsletters.

C. Improve Communication with the Public

- Improve signage.
- Provide information about jury service.
- Develop an information services desk or staff person.

D. Use Technology to Enhance Communication

- Develop public access websites
- Encourage and promote information sharing systems

Suggested Resources

- CourtTools (www.courtools.org)
- Louisiana Supreme Court Office of Community Relations
- [National Center for State Courts- Social Media and the Courts Network.](#)

III. Advance Judicial Competency

Encourage competency and the continued sharing of expertise and learning on local, state, and national levels in all areas of judicial responsibility. This goal can be achieved by implementing or promoting the following programs or services:

- Utilize bench books or best practices manuals.
- Become involved in mentor programs.
- Participate in governance and leadership programs.
- Facilitate interaction between appellate courts.
- Encourage service on committees tasked with improvement of the justice system.
- Participate in continuing judicial education programs.
- Implement case management systems.
- Implement the strategic plan.
- Promote awareness of problem-solving courts.
- Assess the need for a problem-solving court.

Suggested Resources

- CourtTools (www.courtools.org)
 - ✓ M3: *Time to Disposition*
 - ✓ M4: *Age of Active Pending Caseload*
 - ✓ M5: *Trial Date Certainty*
 - ✓ M6: *Reliability and Integrity of Case Files*
 - ✓ M7: *Collection of Monetary Penalties*
 - ✓ M8: *Effective Use of Jurors*
 - ✓ M9: *Court Employee Satisfaction*
 - ✓ M10: *Cost Per Case*

IV. Clarify and Define Court Governance

Promote and encourage the effective and efficient administration of justice through a model of judicial self-governance of judges, court administrators, and court staff working together in a collegial-based relationship. This goal can be achieved by implementing or promoting the following strategies:

- Define and execute a court governance policy.
- Initiate systematic approach to develop skilled court leaders and managers.
- Emphasize education and professional development to ensure succession of court leaders.
- Develop strategic plans and the requisite planning skills.
- Foster self-assessment through judicial and court performance surveys.
- Advance responsible stewardship of public and court funds and resources.
- Increase and enhance relationships with judicial partners.
- Develop an implementation plan to execute one or more of the campaigns described in the strategic plan.
- Encourage Chief Judge and Judicial Administrator to join governance associations.

Suggested Resources

- CourtTools (www.courtools.org)
- [NCSC – Perspectives on State Court Leadership](#)
- [A Case for Court Governance Principles](#)
- [Improving the Quality of Justice in State Courts](#)
- [The Integration of Judicial Independence and Judicial Administration~The Role of Collegiality in Court Governance](#)

V. Instill Public Confidence

Promote public understanding of the role and function of district judges and the courts they serve. This goal can be achieved by implementing or promoting the following strategies:

A. Participate in Judicial Educational Programs in Schools.

- Participate in “Judges in the Classroom” program.
- Coordinate with local schools, bar associations, and the Louisiana Center for Law and Civic Education to schedule and participate in Law Day or Law Week activities, including mock trials.

B. Improve Awareness of Court Functions Including Problem-Solving Courts

- Educate judicial partners and legislators about everyday court functioning by inviting them to attend sessions of court.
- Invite bar association members, community and civic organizations, parish government officials, and legislators to attend problem-solving courts (“Ride Along”).
- Seek opportunities to speak at meetings of community, religious, civic groups, and foundations about problem-solving courts.
- Use or develop educational materials related to typical court functioning or problem-solving courts for dissemination at community organization meetings and to general public.
- Create a “Speakers Bureau” of judges who are willing to speak on specific court-related topics.

C. Utilize Technology and Media to Promote Public Access and Improve Public Relations

- Designate staff or contract for services to create and regularly update court website.
- Utilize parish and other local government websites to inform the public about court.
- Establish court website links with judicial partners’ websites.
- Identify and include public-friendly website content, layout design, and tools.
- Solicit feedback through online public satisfaction surveys.

- Use public access radio and television stations of local government and universities to include programming about court-related activities. Designate staff or utilize the Supreme Court's public relations department to create and disseminate public service announcements and press releases.

D. Improve Efficiencies of and Appreciation for Jury Service

- Take measures to subpoena only as many jurors as are necessary for the week.
- Use court staff and technology to keep jury venire informed about status of trials scheduled for the week.
- Keep statistics on juror utilization.
- Address the jury venire about the number of trials, pleas, or settlements that have occurred as a result of the venire's service.
- Use jury satisfaction surveys both for those who are sworn in as petit jurors and those who appeared but were not selected.
- Send letters of appreciation or certificates to jurors who have served as petit jurors.

Suggested Resources

- [NCSC – Public Trust and Confidence Resource Guide](#)
- [Louisiana Center for Law and Civic Education](#)
- [Louisiana Appleseed](#)
- [Louisiana District Judges Association – Judges in the Classroom Program](#)

External Factors

These are factors outside of the courts' control that may affect the district courts' ability to implement the strategic plan.

- Lack of direct staff
- Reliance on other elected offices and governmental agencies
- Reliance on judicial administrator of the Louisiana Supreme Court
- Reliance on Louisiana District Judges Association and the Louisiana Association of Juvenile and Family Court Judges
- Pressures exerted upon judicial independence by special interest groups
- Insufficient and uneven resources and facilities
- Legislative initiatives and oversight
- Media attention
- Public interest with government in general

Implementation Indicators

A major step in the improvement of the district courts is the adoption of the suggestions provided in the strategic plan. To that end, surveys will be used to assess the ways in which the courts are advancing the justice campaigns and using the suggested strategies. These surveys will offer an opportunity for the courts to track their progress and to report challenges faced during the implementation process. Below are examples of questions that will be asked:

1. Did your court implement this strategy?
2. How did your court implement this strategy? What actions did the court take to improve?
3. Has the court already implemented this strategy?
4. Did any obstacles prevent implementation? If so, what were they?
5. Are there other strategies related to the campaign that your court has implemented?

Oversight and Maintenance

The Committee agreed at its 05/23/14 meeting to remove the section previously written for Oversight and Maintenance and to insert a comment to reflect the formation of a committee under the direction of the Supreme Court. The stated plan for this action is as follows:

That the Louisiana District Judges Association has a standing committee whose members may be charged with maintaining the strategic plan;

That the LDJA will seek formal approval and/or authority from the Supreme Court for the continued work of this committee or some altered form of the committee in the maintenance of the strategic plan;

That by a proposed Order of the Supreme Court the members of the committee will be named and their charge specified;

That such maintenance and charge will be performed under the direction of the Supreme Court.

Additional Miscellaneous Resource Tools for Implementation

The Committee agreed at its 05/23/14 meeting to build out this section listing varied and extensive resources that may be used by the courts. The committee will add resources to this list as suggested by committee members and upon circulation to the LDJA General Membership.

- [American University Justice Programs Office](#)
- [Center for Court Innovation](#)
- [State Justice Institute](#)
- [National Center for State Courts Performance Measurement Resource Guide](#)
- [National Center for State Courts Topics Index](#)
- [4th Judicial District Court](#)
- [9th Judicial District Court](#)
- [15th Judicial District Court](#)
- www.LDJA.org