

**STRATEGIC PLAN OF THE CITY AND PARISH COURTS  
MISSION STATEMENT,  
GOALS, OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES  
FIVE-YEAR PLAN (FISCAL YEARS 2002-2006)  
SUBMITTED: MAY 14, 2002**

**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) Rule Providing for Availability of Assistive Listening Devices and Other Tools for Enhancing Audibility.** Each city and parish court should enact a rule providing for the availability of assistive listening devices and other tools for enhancing the audibility of proceedings. Each city and parish court should further include a notice on all subpoenas that persons requiring enhanced audibility should call prior to a hearing to inform the court

of the kind of assistance needed. This will allow the court sufficient time to arrange for the use of proper assistive listening devices.

**1.1(b) 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 procedures for dealing with emergencies in the courtroom and judges' chambers, 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.

**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 then 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 non-English speaking persons and by persons with disabilities. Such rules should address, when appropriate, issues such as bilingual signage, bilingual materials, the availability of court documents in alternative formats for accommodating persons with sight disabilities, the use of interpreters, the use of TDDs and relay services, and the use of assistive listening devices.

**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.** The Louisiana City Judges Association, in association with 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.** 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.** 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.** The Louisiana City Judges Association, with assistance from the Louisiana Judicial College and 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 court and 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 court, having jurisdiction over child abuse and neglect cases, should develop, implement, and maintain, with assistance from the Supreme Court and the Louisiana Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, 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.

**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.** The Louisiana Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, with assistance from the Louisiana Court Improvement Program, should develop a comprehensive plan for assuring that all judges having juvenile jurisdiction are aware of the requirements of the Louisiana Children's Code with respect to the federal Adoption and Safe Families Act and are properly trained and motivated to meet such requirements.

**2.3(c) Restructuring FINS.** The Louisiana Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges and the Louisiana City Judges Association should assist the Judicial Administrator of the Supreme Court in his efforts to restructure the processes, systems of accountability and data collection procedures of the Families in Need of Services (FINS) offices of the state. Each court should take direct responsibility for its FINS office and 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.

**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 faithfully adhere to laws, procedural rules, and established policies.**

**Strategies:**

**3.1(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.

**3.1(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.

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

**Strategies:**

**3.2(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.

**3.3 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:**

**3.3(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.

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

**Strategies:**



**3.4(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.

**3.4(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.

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

**Strategies:**

**3.5(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.** The city and parish court judges, 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.** Ensure that all city and parish court judges have a sufficient number of highly qualified staff, including secretaries, law clerks, and court reporters, to support and facilitate judicial adjudicative and administrative functions.

**4.2(b) Legal Resources.** Ensure that all city and parish court judges and their support staffs have sufficient access to published and automated legal resources to facilitate judicial adjudicative and administrative functions.

**4.2(c) Judicial Expense Funds.** The Louisiana City Judges Association should develop, with assistance from the Supreme Court, general guidelines for managing judicial expense funds, especially the propriety of certain expenditures and the use of fair procurement procedures.

**4.2(d) Judicial Accounting and Financial Control.** The managers of the various judicial expense funds should periodically meet with the accounting and auditing personnel of the Judicial Administrator of the Supreme Court to develop common approaches to accounting and financial controls.

**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) Restructuring of Court System.** The Louisiana City Judges Association should participate actively in initiatives that may be undertaken by the Judicial Administrator of the Supreme Court, perhaps under the aegis of the Judicial Council, to examine and explore ways to control the number of new judgeships by using well-trained hearing officers in lieu of new judgeships, or by restructuring courts.

**4.2(h) Restructuring Court Financing.** The Louisiana City Judges Association and the Louisiana Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges should participate actively in the

Governor's initiative to examine and, possibly restructure, the system of financing the judicial branch of state government. All 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.**

##### **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 ways to inform the community of each court's structure, function, and programs.

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

##### **Strategies:**

**4.5(a) Court Technology.** 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 develop a master plan for the development of 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) Uniform Court Rules and Forms.** The Louisiana City Judges Association should endorse and support efforts to develop uniform rules and standard forms.

**4.5(c) Comprehensive Continuum of Children's Services.** The Louisiana City Judges Association and the Louisiana Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges should expand their efforts to support the initiative of the Governor's Children's Cabinet to develop and implement 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(f).

**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 3.5(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(h).