

**STRATEGIC PLAN
OF THE
LOUISIANA
DISTRICT COURTS**

2020 - 2024

OVERVIEW

The 2020-2024 Strategic Plan of the Louisiana District Courts is a guide for district courts in their efforts to continuously improve and administer justice in an equal, effective, and efficient manner. This plan is the result of input from judges and court administrators who sought to address the most pressing issues facing the courts. Through a series of surveys and email communications, judges throughout the state prioritized the five goals and accompanying strategies identified in this plan. Those goals and strategies are set out through action items that will serve as performance measures during implementation of the plan.

A number of themes emerged throughout the plan, including a need for enhanced collaboration between justice partners, greater use of technology within the court system, and developing a plan for alternative funding sources. As in years past, the most difficult part of strategic planning is implementation. This plan aims to streamline that process by offering specific tasks geared towards attaining each desired goal.

MISSION STATEMENT

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.

VISION STATEMENT

A mission statement outlines organizational purpose, whereas a vision statement is an abbreviated theory of the future direction of the courts. The vision is not so much a roadmap as it is a reference point for action and learning towards desired objectives. The district courts of Louisiana will:

- Insure that court procedures and structure best facilitate the fair, expeditious, and economical administration of justice
- Incorporate technology to increase access and convenience, improve docket management, and process cases more efficiently
- Use strategic planning to develop and maintain the highest possible level of services to the public

STATEMENT OF GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The Strategic Plan outlines five goals designed to improve the District Courts and fulfill its mission. These goals will be implemented in a yearly sequence, with efforts and resources concentrated on one goal per year. To this end, the goals are intended to build upon one another. Alongside each goal is a set of strategies and action items.

- 1 Strengthen Public Confidence in the Judiciary
- 2 Establish Court Governance Rules and Policies
- 3 Improve Case Processing
- 4 Provide Adequate Access to Justice
- 5 Elevate Judicial Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

To assess whether courts are progressing towards the plan goals, we propose a series of performance indicators. In addition to measuring progress, these indicators can be used to clarify the needs of the judiciary and to identify emerging issues. It is important to note that performance indicators are not intended to penalize or single out specific judges or courts. Work performed pursuant to the indicators will be reported in aggregate from all courts.

One way to measure progress is to assess the extent to which courts engage in the strategies and implement action items suggested within the plan. The Annual Justice At Work survey will be used to collect information regarding court-specific activities, and these results will be cumulated to provide an estimate of the percentage of courts engaging in a given action item. It is also important to assess whether these activities are translating to actual outcomes. To this end, the District Courts will rely on existing performance measures established by the National Center for State Courts (e.g., CourTools), focusing on those measures that are relevant to the goals outlined in the plan.

GOAL 1. STRENGTHEN PUBLIC CONFIDENCE IN THE JUDICIARY

Inspiring confidence and trust in the judiciary is a key component of the mission of the Louisiana District Courts. Through this goal, the courts will endeavor to promote public understanding of the role and function of district judges and the courts they serve. At the center of this goal is also the need to develop a stable funding system for the judiciary by reducing its reliance on fines and fees.

Strategies

Performance Indicators

Develop a stable funding system for the judiciary

- Coordinate efforts with the Louisiana Supreme Court *Price of Justice* recommendations
- Encourage state legislature and local governments and municipalities to work towards a unified funding system
- Explore alternatives to fines and fees for court operations
- Develop a consistent method of collecting data on case filings, case types, and time to disposition.

Utilize positive media through LDJA committees and regional public relations outreach

- Improve distribution of information about the judiciary
- Encourage judges to use toolkit with draft articles approved by the Louisiana Supreme Court
- Involve judges in writing media releases
- Finalize a media response process with the Louisiana State Bar Association
- Establish lawyer response teams
- Release an annual report about what judges do
- Use social media as an outlet to release interpretation of decisions

Plan and invite stakeholders to attend judicial ride-alongs and civic education activities

- Schedule judicial ride-alongs prior to the opening of the Regular Legislative Session
- Form relationships with state representatives and senators
- Seek out speaking engagements with schools, local chambers of commerce, and other community entities
- Participate in Law Day activities

GOAL 2. ESTABLISH COURT GOVERNANCE RULES AND POLICIES

For court organizations, governance provides the framework by which courts reach and communicate organizational decisions, establish business activities, and develop short- and long-term strategies. In its most effective capacity, court governance promotes meaningful input into the decision-making process, provides consistency and predictability of operations, and increases transparency and accountability.

Strategies

Performance Indicators

Provide education about court governance

- Draw from existing educational resources from the National Center for State Courts and the National Association for Court Management
- Encourage Judicial College programming to incorporate court governance principles

Enhance partnerships between judges, clerks, and court managers

- Identify justice partners
- Organize a justice coordinating committee in your court
- Develop administrative policies
- Set clear delegation of responsibilities
- Commit to full *en banc* meeting participation

Institute safety and security procedures

- Review or update Court Security Assessment
- Continue partnership with LASC Security Committee
- Encourage full attendance at court security trainings
- Work with local government to provide sufficiently trained law enforcement for court security
- Collaborate with the Sheriff's Association for enhanced court security programming
- Support and encourage LASC development of court security training modules for regional seminars

Expand data collection methods

- Refer to existing definitions and case information established by the National Center for State Courts' Court Statistics Project
- Identify civil cases by type and value
- Establish a common platform for all divisions of your court
- Utilize data collected in current case filing sheet
- Develop a triage approach upon initial filing, including more sophisticated case descriptions
- Use a case tracking systems to determine time from filing to disposition
- Augment current judicial work-point system by capturing appearance data for determination of work-point values

**Improve processes
for indigency
determination**

- Establish standards for indigency determination
- Establish standards for assessment and collection
- Collaborate with clerks for standardized IFP determination, fine/fee assessment, and collection protocol

GOAL 3. IMPROVE CASE PROCESSING

Case management has for decades been recognized as an essential court function. However, yesterday's management practices must evolve in order to meet the needs of tomorrow's courts and court users. No longer may courts rely on the parties to self-manage litigation, but rather courts should accept full responsibility for managing their cases from initial filing through disposition.

Strategies Performance Indicators

Collaborate with clerks and administrators

CIVIL

- Establish a committee to identify civil case management issues
- Secure *en banc* commitment from judges when developing and instituting policy
- Ensure that courts and clerks are working together and aligning their efforts
- Review and apply LDJA/Clerk's of Court Liaison Committee recommendations
- Support and advocate for e-filing in your court
- Integrate judges' and clerks' case management systems

CRIMINAL

- Create or activate criminal justice coordinating committee
- Hold quarterly or regularly scheduled meetings to discuss case processing
- Explore methods for reducing felony dockets to manageable numbers

Institute docket management and services

CIVIL

- Develop a triage system with the Clerk to docket cases by case type, case value, discovery needs, and issues in controversy
- Allocate resources to address needs of litigants by case type
- Create specialty dockets or refine docket organization to increase efficiency
- Use e-signatures where statutorily authorized

CRIMINAL

- Consider establishing a specialty court
- Improve system of pre-trial conferences
- Institute video court proceedings where authorized
- Use e-warrants and e-signatures where statutorily authorized

Establish uniform data collection methods

- Rely upon publications from the NCSC, NACM, IAALS, and other court management institutions.
- Seek out opportunities and apply for grants
- Work with vendors to access and quantify data already being collected
- Utilize data collected in current case filing sheet
- Implement a uniform value system to categorize cases
- Collect data by case type and value to create efficient case processes
- Establish a common platform for all divisions of your court
- Use data to augment transparency and accountability

**Leverage
technology to
improve case
processing**

- Integrate case processing through judicial dashboards
- Explore e-filing for your court
- Integrate with existing clerk case management system
- Use data collected from civil intake sheets
- Work with LASC to explore additional case type data input
- Work with the LASC and clerks committee to establish a uniform case numbering system
- Discourage manual case processing
- Establish a common platform for all divisions of your court

GOAL 4. PROVIDE ADEQUATE ACCESS TO JUSTICE

The district courts are committed to ensuring that all litigants have equal access to justice. To that end, courts must acknowledge the various barriers that impede access to justice and to address these difficulties through education, the deployment of resources, and collaboration with justice partners.

Strategies

Performance Indicators

Address behavioral health issues within the court system

- Attend seminars and conferences related to behavioral health issues
- Gather resources for addressing juveniles with special needs
- Consider feasibility of developing behavioral health and/or an AOT Courts
- Form a criminal justice coordinating committee with judicial partners and local entities to develop a plan for the preferred behavioral health intercept point
- Research and apply for grants to establish procedures and options to address behavioral health issues in the judicial system
- Explore crisis intervention training programs for court personnel and judges
- Gather information about behavioral health and substance abuse treatment within your community
- Coordinate efforts with Department of Corrections for custodial treatment

Provide resources for self-represented litigants

- Develop self-help desks
- Utilize pro-bono and legal services
- Adopt mobile applications and other online resources
- Learn about local and statewide resources (Attend Service Provider Summit)
- Seek information from the LDJA SRL Committee & ATJ Commission

Improve processes for indigency determination

- Establish standards for indigent determination
- Establish standards for assessment and collection of fines and fees
- Collaborate with clerks for standardized IFP determination, fine/fee assessment, and collection protocol
- Seek out education and seminars regarding cost assessments and alternative payment options
- Follow guidance from the LASC and apply Legislative changes from JRI

Leverage technology to provide better access to the courts

- Develop SRL services, mobile applications, and online resources
- Refer SRLs to LDJA tutorials and other web-based resources
- Develop an online resource center
- Adopt uniform forms created and proposed by the ATJ Commission
- Work to implement recommendations from the LDJA Technology Committee, such as online calendaring, docket management, and case tracking systems
- Enable litigants to present photos, and other evidence from their smartphones during a courtroom procedure
- Develop a video conferencing option for specified pretrial procedures
- Encourage the adoption of e-filing in your jurisdiction

GOAL 5. ELEVATE JUDICIAL KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS, AND ABILITIES

Having a capable and competent judiciary is central to the mission of the District Courts and the continued fulfillment of its strategic priorities. We strive to build upon the judiciary’s capabilities by promoting existing resources, educational opportunities, and mentorship.

Strategies

Performance Indicators

Collaborate with the Louisiana Judicial College

- Attend Louisiana Judicial College conferences, seminars, and workshops
- Offer ideas for judicial education topics
- Volunteer to speak at judicial education programs
- Use reference materials and bench books posted on the LJC website
- Participate in the judicial mentor program as a mentor (for new judges, stay in contact with your mentor)

Refer to Resources on the LDJA Website

- Review the LDJA “Resources” page
- Join LDJA Committees and attend committee meetings
- Attend LDJA General Membership meetings

Seek out Varied Educational Opportunities

- Attend seminars and webinars hosted by the National Judicial College, ABA, National Center for State Courts, and other judicial programming

Encourage data collection, case tracking, and docket management

- Pursue educational opportunities regarding data collection, case tracking, and docket management
- Rely upon publications from the NCSC, NACM, IAALS, and other court management institutions.
- Collect data by case type and value to create efficient case processes
- Use data to augment transparency and accountability
- Integrate with existing clerk case management system
- Establish a common platform for all divisions of your court
- Discourage manual case processing
- Encourage e-filing

EXTERNAL FACTORS

A number of factors outside of the courts' control may limit the implementation of the plan and the attainment of the goals outlined herein. Although the courts cannot directly control these external factors, identifying and anticipating them puts the courts in a better position to respond to existing and emerging challenges. Acknowledging these factors was instrumental to the development of the strategic plan and continues to be important in its implementation.

- Funding (amount and framework)
- Justice partner coordination difficulties (Clerks, Sheriffs, District Attorneys, etc.)
- Media attention
- Political structure providing for independently elected officials
- Disparity among jurisdictions regarding caseload, procedure, policies, etc.
- Staffing challenges (quality and quantity)
- Legislative initiatives affecting the administration of justice
- Public conviction in special interest group agendas
- Economic downturns and fluctuations