

**Connecticut Judicial Branch
Public Service and Trust Commission**



A Five-Year Update

December 2012

**The Hon. Chase T. Rogers
The Hon. Alexandra D. DiPentima**

December 10, 2012

Dear Public Service and Trust Commission member,

Five years ago you accepted Chief Justice Chase T. Rogers' invitation to serve on the newly established Public Service and Trust Commission and to work to develop the Judicial Branch's first, long-term Strategic Plan. As the Chair of the Commission, I wanted to provide you with an update on the effect of the Strategic Plan, not only on the operations of the Judicial Branch, but on changes that have served to increase access to justice for all people.

Since the Plan was accepted by the Chief Justice in 2008, dozens of activities have been implemented to support the five outcome goals of improving access, responding to changing demographics, improving the delivery of services, promoting collaboration, and ensuring accountability. Some initiatives, such as weekly Volunteer Attorney Day programs in several judicial districts, are well-known to our stakeholders. Others, such as the installation of telephonic translation services in our Clerk's and other public offices, may not be as well-known but are invaluable to the tens of thousands of people who are now more easily able to navigate the judicial system.

As you will read on the following pages, the Strategic Plan has served to guide the Judicial Branch to be not only reactive to the needs of court users, but to be proactive by developing and implementing initiatives that have improved services to all stakeholders, including the bar, parties to cases, jurors, and victims. We are proud that implementation of the Plan has been accomplished at little or no cost and we believe it has helped to increase the public's trust. We can not and will not compromise our mission of resolving matters in a fair, timely, efficient and open manner, regardless of budget constraints.

As you may recall the Plan was designed as a five-year blueprint and thus we are now engaged in developing the second Strategic Plan. The tools we developed during the planning and implementation processes will serve us well as we design performance measures, re-engineer our court processes utilizing new technologies, and invest in and support our Judges and staff.

Thank you, again, for your support of the Judicial Branch.

Sincerely yours,

Alexandra D. DiPentima
Chief Appellate Court Judge

"Equal justice under law is not merely a caption on the facade of the Supreme Court building, it is perhaps the most inspiring ideal of our society. It is one of the ends for which our entire legal system exists...it is fundamental that justice should be the same, in substance and availability, without regard to economic status."

Lewis Powell, Jr., U.S. Supreme Court Justice

At her swearing-in ceremony in June 2007, Chief Justice Chase T. Rogers spoke about the need to develop a long-term strategic plan to assist the Judicial Branch in its mission to resolve matters in a fair, timely, efficient and open manner.

"We will develop a concrete plan to provide the best public service that we are capable of, so that the public trust will be enhanced," she said. "We will have an action-oriented strategic plan that makes a difference in people's lives."

Five years later, dozens and dozens of initiatives that were developed by the [committees and workgroups](#) of the Public Service and Trust Commission have been implemented to support the Judicial Branch Strategic Plan's five outcome goals of increasing access to justice, responding to changing demographics, improving the delivery of services, promoting collaboration, and ensuring accountability to all stakeholders.

The activities that support those outcome goals, which were developed by the Commission's implementation committees and workgroups, include: volunteer attorney programs in four judicial districts; streamlined jury and disability accommodation processes; the expansion and simplification of court information, forms and publications in English and other languages; training for magistrates and court staff; mentoring for Judges; assessments of Branch facilities for accessibility; expanded use of technology including videoconferencing of some court procedures; and the growth of electronic filing and online information. In short, the work accomplished under the Branch's [first-ever, long-term Strategic Plan](#) is making a difference in people's lives by improving access to justice.

The economic collapse of 2007 and 2008 occurred in the early stages of developing and implementing the Strategic Plan. Consequently, its initiatives were influenced, in part, as a result of those destructive economic forces. Increased foreclosures, more small claims and civil collections cases, the [Interest On Lawyers' Trust Accounts](#) (IOLTA) collapse and the state's massive loss of tax revenue resulted in challenges not seen in decades. While the Judicial Branch's budget represents only 2.52 percent of the state budget, we were asked to absorb cuts of nearly three times that amount while still providing the same level of services to the public. The Judicial Branch, of course, is unique: We cannot shut down for business when someone's liberty or property is at stake. Instead, we have been forced to be

creative in how we use our limited resources. The Strategic Plan has been an impetus and a guide for that creativity.

The Plan's initiatives and implementation have been well-documented and publicized on the Branch's website with the release of [the reports](#) that detail what has been accomplished, what has been started, and what has not yet been achieved. We believe that the transparency with which the Plan was developed, expanded upon and implemented is necessary to increase the public's trust and supports the accountability goal.

The Plan's fluidity was recognized from the outset and this is one reason why we believe it has been successful. What began as an intense review and sometimes critical assessment of the inner workings of the Branch and their effect on stakeholders has evolved into a way of doing business: analyzing what works and what does not, and then adjusting processes or expectations.

After five years, it is safe to say that much of what has been accomplished can be traced to the genesis of the strategic planning process when it was determined the Plan would be developed based on the [public's needs](#), not the Branch's *belief* about what the public needs. In response to [what the public told us](#), significant changes were designed to create efficiencies through better management and utilization of technology, time, people, and procedures, have been implemented. Those changes have also supported a more level playing field by implementing uniformity in all judicial districts whenever possible.

We are aware that while developing a long-term plan is relatively easy, executing its stated goals is often difficult, and sustaining that drive can be even more difficult. The latter can be particularly true when there is no 'buy-in' from staff. Very often that lack of passion for change stems from the need to cling to comfortable routines or the belief that "we've always done it this way so why should we change now." Accordingly, it was determined that unless the Bench and Judicial Branch staff members were included from the beginning and asked their opinions, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to effectuate meaningful changes that would be beneficial not only to the public but also to the internal organization. We believe that another reason the implementation of our Strategic Plan has been so successful is because all of our stakeholders were involved from the beginning.

While many of the changes in how the Branch operates have been subtle, the effects are felt each day, in hundreds of ways, through our interactions with attorneys, litigants and members of the public. This is why people say we are better today than we were five years ago. In short, we approach what we do every day, by focusing on our stakeholders' needs.

We hope that you agree that the time and efforts of the Public Service and Trust Commission were well-spent and that your work has helped to elevate the service provided to the public. As the Branch moves on to its next strategic planning phase, we will take the lessons learned in both the planning and implementation process to continue working to meet our mission to resolve matters in a fair, timely, efficient, and open manner.

The following pages detail how the Plan is working, what has been accomplished, and what remains to be done to support the five outcome goals and continue to improve Branch operations. You will also learn about the next phase of strategic planning and implementation, with its focus on human capital, reengineering court procedures, and performance measurements. If you wish to read more deeply about the Strategic Plan's results, you may view more comprehensive details on our website at www.jud.ct.gov/Committees/pst.

Outcome Goal: Access

The Judicial Branch will provide equal access to all of its facilities, processes and information through the identification and elimination of barriers.

Barriers to access to justice can take the form of physically inaccessible buildings, lack of language diversity or language assistance, the inability to consult an attorney, or even the lack of access to facilities and processes because of time constraints. The Strategic Plan's access goal resulted in the establishment of numerous committees who then made dozens of recommendations to increase access.

As a result of the recommendations, the Branch:

- Established, in 2011, an [Access to Justice Commission](#), chaired by the Hon. Raymond R. Norko with membership from the public and private sector bar, academia, business and Branch staff. The Commission has [developed recommendations](#) to increase access to justice by the establishment of permanent and steady legal aid funding; the use of technology to increase access to justice; and the development of a comprehensive training guide for the Branch's Court Service Center and Public Information Desk staff who assist hundreds of thousands of self-represented parties each year. These access to justice initiatives are moving forward in conjunction with the Chief Justice's focused efforts to encourage the bar, including in-house counsel to Connecticut corporations, to increase much-needed pro bono services.
- Developed [e-filing technology](#) that allows self-represented parties and attorneys to initiate small claims cases.

- Successfully proposed [legislation in 2012](#) that established a steady funding stream for legal aid programs through certain fee increases. The fee increases will in part offset the devastating impact the collapse of the housing market had on the IOLTA funds that are distributed by the Connecticut Bar Foundation. The IOLTA fund plunged from a high in excess of \$20 million in 2007, to just \$3 million in 2011, resulting in lay-offs at legal aid providers around the state and diminishing the availability of civil legal services to the poor. The new fee increases are expected to bring \$5.2 million annually through 2015.

- Accepted the recommendations of the [Access to Facilities Committee](#) following its long-term assessment of the accessibility of Branch facilities, exterior and interior signage, and online information about court facilities. The [Committee's recommendations](#) will be prioritized for implementation by an [internal workgroup](#).

- Established Volunteer Attorney Day programs in Bridgeport, Hartford, New Haven, Stamford, and Waterbury that provide assistance to self-represented parties with cases on family, civil or foreclosure dockets. In the last two years, more than 2,000 people have been helped by pro bono attorneys.

- Purchased more than 130 dual handsets that are installed in clerk's offices and other public offices allowing [non-English speaking court users](#) to utilize "Language Line," a near-instant translation service via telephone. In addition, this service can be offered on any Judicial Branch phone at any time during the day. Offered in more than 170 languages, the Language Line provides on average translation to more than 54,000 people in our clerks' offices. The Interpreter and Translation Services Unit provides services for parties in cases involving loss of liberty, children, juvenile matters and housing matters. The expanded use of Telephonic Bilingual Services broadened our ability to provide interpreting services for a variety of other court matters.

- Established an [Americans with Disabilities Act Advisory Board](#), chaired by Deputy Chief Court Administrator Judge Patrick L. Carroll III, which will annually offer a report and recommendations to the Chief Justice to identify areas of need and progress made, to ensure access to justice for people of varying abilities.

- Established [clear and simplified processes for people with disabilities](#) to request accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and trained more than 100 staff members to serve as [ADA Contacts](#) in every Branch facility. An ADA-specific website provides links to the contact people, accommodation request forms, available services and auxiliary aides, as well as forms and information on the complaint process. Dozens of ADA requests are made and filled each year, and the Branch provides a plethora of services and accommodations at no cost to people with disabilities.

Outcome Goal: Changing Demographics

The Judicial Branch will provide a diverse and culturally competent environment that is sensitive to the values and responsive to the needs of all who interact with it.

Connecticut has historically been a largely homogenous state, but that is changing. Census data show the state's Hispanic and Spanish-speaking populations are growing; more than 1 in 8 Connecticut residents are foreign-born, and 1 in 5 speaks a language other than English at home. It is estimated that some 17 percent of all residents have a disability, but the number is higher for people over 65, with more than 1 in 3 reporting a disability.

The Strategic Plan's changing demographics goal prompted the Branch to establish the Diversity in the Branch Workplace Committee. The Committee's work was completed in 2009 and eighteen recommendations to support the Branch in meeting the changing demographics goal were submitted to Chief Justice Rogers. The Committee's recommendations were accepted and the Chief Justice subsequently established an Advisory Committee on Cultural Competency to, among other tasks, develop an implementation plan for the recommendations.

The work of the [Advisory Committee on Cultural Competency](#) supports many of the Plan's outcome goals of access to justice, changing demographics, delivery of services, collaboration and accountability. The Advisory Committee has conducted more than two dozen focus groups of Judicial Branch employees on the topic of cultural competency, and, as a result, developed a two-day introductory course that is currently being piloted within the Court Support Services Division. It is expected that the program will be consolidated into a single-day program and be presented to all Branch employees, beginning in the spring of 2013. The Advisory Committee has also approached community speakers who will provide free forums on specific areas of cultural competency, such as gender and cultural identification, to Branch staff.

The External Affairs Advisory Board was formed to oversee the Speakers Bureau, the Seniors and the Law program, and the Media Campaign for Public Education, which were three initiatives identified in the Public Service and Trust Commission's Implementation Plan. [The Speakers Bureau](#), which includes many Judges, is an ongoing Branch function that conducts informational and outreach sessions to civic, educational, and community groups. Speakers include those fluent in Spanish, Italian and Portuguese. Additionally, the External Affairs Division conducts [extensive outreach to media entities](#) that cater to those who speak languages other than English.

Cognizant of the growing numbers and needs of individuals with limited English proficiency, many of whom represent themselves in civil court cases, the Branch has accelerated its production of [Spanish language forms and publications](#) aimed at providing clear and concise court information. [According to our records](#), in 2011, interpreter services were provided more than 48,000 times in 38 languages. Additionally, the phone translation service logged 10,000 uses in 2011 statewide.

To date, under the changing demographics goal, the Branch has:

- Conducted limited-English proficiency training for more than 100 of its vendors, a practice that is unique to state judicial systems. More than 1,500 Branch staff have been trained on working with and responding to the needs of people with limited-English proficiency.
- Trained more than 100 people from all five Branch divisions to be field contacts for people with disabilities. The [ADA Contacts](#) are generally front-line staff who assist stakeholders, including jurors, parties to cases, victims, witnesses and others in securing reasonable accommodations under the ADA.
- Conducted more than a half dozen focus groups of Branch employees on cultural competency, to engage the staff in a dialogue about the importance of providing excellent public service to people from all backgrounds.
- Established an ongoing dialogue with other New England states to explore collaborative initiatives and, if necessary, to expand services to the LEP population.
- Begun a pilot program to deliver, in Spanish, the Advisement of Rights in the Family Support Magistrate session of the Hartford Judicial District.
- Developed a remote video interpreting pilot project.
- Developed sensitivity training on working with people with different abilities, including those with hidden disabilities.

Outcome Goal: Delivery of Services

The Judicial Branch will provide effective, uniform and consistent delivery of services by enhancing the management of court practices.

During the strategic planning process the Branch heard concerns from people, particularly members of the bar, about the lack of uniformity in certain processes and policies, with judicial districts conducting administrative work differently from district to district. That analysis resulted in the establishment of [certain standing orders](#) to help ensure uniformity and curb provincial processes.

The delivery of services to the estimated 7 million people who enter our facilities each year is key to boosting trust and confidence in the Judicial Branch. As evidenced by surveys conducted early in the strategic planning process, when people feel they are being listened to, even if they are not receiving the answer that they need or want, they still believe the system is fair. Yet, in this increasingly online world, sometimes a person's interaction with the Judicial Branch is not face to face at all, but electronic. However, even when an individual does not interact directly with a staff member, that does not mean the Branch should provide poorer service.

Under the delivery of services goal, the Branch has, among other initiatives:

- Established in 2011 a [Pro Bono Committee](#), led by Judge William S. Bright, to establish a concrete pro bono plan and make recommendations on how to increase both the number of participating attorneys and the hours donated by volunteer attorneys. The Committee hosted the first-ever Pro Bono Summit in late 2011, drawing more than 100 attorneys and Judges from around the state. The Summit featured the debut of a [Pro Bono Catalog, which highlights some four dozen programs that offer free civil legal](#) aid to low-income people, and the launching of [a new pro bono portal, probono.ctlawhelp.org](#), that features not only the programs that need attorneys' help, but success stories from those who have benefited from the assistance of volunteer lawyers.
- Launched in 2010, a Volunteer Attorney Day program that currently operates in five Judicial Districts (Bridgeport, Hartford, Waterbury, New Haven and Stamford), providing assistance to those with family and foreclosure cases. This free program has drawn more than 2,000 people, and, according to one survey of Judges and court staff, resulted in those individuals being better prepared for their court appearances.
- Established a pilot program in the Child Protection Session in the Middlesex Judicial District that allows attorneys with appearances in cases to access the audio recordings of those proceedings. The impetus for the pilot was a recommendation from the Committee to Expedite Child Protection Appeals, based upon the belief that expedited access to the recording of a proceeding would allow appeals attorneys to more quickly determine whether an appeal is necessary.
- Established [a procedure for jurors to answer their summons](#) at any time of the day or night to confirm or reschedule their jury service, freeing up juror telephone hotline staff to respond to questions and concerns.
- Sharply [reduced the small claims case backlog](#), and in 2011, began requiring attorneys to electronically file small claims cases, and in 2012, began allowing self-represented parties to initiate a case electronically. The goal is to create a completely paperless small claims docket.

- Installed videoconferencing equipment in court and Court Support Services Division locations, resulting in tens of thousands of dollars in annual savings as a result of decreases in fuel costs and equipment wear-and-tear. Videoconferencing has also curbed the danger inherent in prisoner transport when used in lieu of in-person appearances in certain proceedings. Further, videoconferencing is increasingly being used at the Appellate Court, for the Sentence Review Division docket, and is approved for use in competency hearings when defendants are being held at the Connecticut Valley Hospital.
- Established a Commission on Civil Court Alternative Dispute Resolution that made [several dozen recommendations](#) in 2012 to ensure uniformity by establishing best practices in [ADR programs](#); developing training for court-sponsored ADR providers; and assessing court sponsored ADR programs. These recommendations will result in high-quality delivery of services.

Outcome Goal: Collaboration

The Judicial Branch will improve its communication and collaboration with the Executive and Legislative branches of government and their agencies, the Bar, other partners and the public, as well as within the Branch, to better serve the needs of all who interact with it.

Early on, the strategic planning process spurred real connections between the Judicial Branch and the other branches of government. While the Branch's independence is critical if the public is to believe in and support its role, there must also be recognition of interdependence among the three branches. As a result of the cooperation with the other branches during the planning process, the public's needs are being better served.

Members of the bar have also been especially critical to the development, implementation, and evolution of the Plan. Members from all areas have taken part in focus groups, been active leaders and members of committees and workgroups, encouraged their peers to volunteer for programs, and advocated for the Branch with the other branches of government, when appropriate.

Under the Collaboration goal, the Judicial Branch has sought the expertise and input of the members of the bar and the Branch's front-line staff in the development of electronic filing. That has resulted in a system that is user-friendly to both external and internal stakeholders, resulting in efficiencies for all. And while many states have some electronic filing capabilities, Connecticut is unique in that its system has been entirely developed in-house. That business model has not only saved the state money by eliminating the need for contractors to provide services, but allowed for the development of a system that is tailored to Connecticut's specific practice requirements.

Under the collaboration goal the Branch has, among other initiatives:

- Developed and presented multiple training sessions on E-Services and e-filing for the Office of the Attorney General, emphasizing information that is available online and through E-Services, such as short calendars and judicial notices, and demonstrating functions that can be performed through E-Services, such as calendar markings and filing documents.
- Drafted, in conjunction with the members of the public and private bar, new revisions to Practice Book rules on the filing of administrative appeals to streamline the process, reduce the size of the record, facilitate electronic filing and reduce costs and delays. The drafts will be submitted to the Rules Committee early next year.
- Developed online access to Child Protection dockets for assistant attorneys general and court-appointed attorneys.
- Supported strong relationships with the bar through [the Civil Commission](#), which is composed of representatives of the bar, Judges and Administrative Judges. The Civil Commission meets quarterly to discuss civil case procedures, propose changes and improvements to the civil system and Practice Book rules, and provide a forum for communicating concerns and issues for the Bench and bar. The ongoing meetings support the resolution of cases in a fair, timely and cost-efficient manner.
- Conducted regular [Legal Exchange meetings](#) in every judicial district where Judges and court staff meet with the bar to discuss local issues and concerns, and to share information about the latest developments in court operations and trends.
- Partnered with legal aid providers to create and pass legislation to increase certain court fees, the majority of which are dedicated to providing a steady funding stream for legal aid programs that are administered by the Connecticut Bar Foundation.
- Sought ongoing input from the bar on the Branch's expansion of electronic case filing, including proposals to simultaneously protect personal identifying information while allowing attorneys general access to such information in child support cases.
- Conducted free annual training, through the law librarians, for new and experienced attorneys on legal research, [law library services](#), E-Services, and web-based court information and services.

Outcome Goal: Accountability

The Judicial Branch will ensure a judicial system where all participants can expect and experience clear, fair and consistent justice from an independent and impartial judiciary.

Increasing the public's trust of the Judicial Branch was the impetus behind the establishment of the Public Service and Trust Commission. With that at its core, the strategic planning process ensured that every Steering Committee meeting, every PSTC meeting, and every meeting of all three dozen PSTC committees were and continue to be publicly noticed and conducted. Agendas and minutes were and are posted online, and members of the public are welcome to observe and submit ideas and concerns to the Judicial Branch. Such transparency is unprecedented.

The Branch also expanded its camera rules in 2008 with the establishment of a pilot program allowing the media to tape certain arraignments in Hartford Superior Court, following the recommendation of the Judicial-Media Committee. [The practice has evolved](#), and in 2011, Practice Book rules were changed to allow the videotaping by the media of certain arraignments, trials and sentencings, with judicial approval, in all thirteen judicial districts.

The [Judicial-Media Committee](#) has conducted annual programs since 2008 for Judges and journalists. The programs, "Law School for Journalists" and "Journalism School for Judges", serve to ensure an ongoing dialogue between the media and Judges and judicial officials to support informed coverage of the judicial system.

Courthouses are the people's houses, and the people who work in these and in other Judicial Branch facilities, work for the public. Under the Strategic Plan, the Branch established the nation's first Courthouse Observation Team (COT) which conducts anonymous observations of staff in non-judicial proceedings to ensure adherence to Branch policies and procedures. In this one-of-a-kind program, staff volunteers visit courthouses and Branch offices as though they are members of the public. The process has grown from simple observations of front-door security checks and face-to-face interactions with clerk's offices, to include interactions in languages other than English, phone calls to offices dedicated to serving victims and child support enforcement, and to the law libraries. To date, every judicial district has been evaluated and the results are shared by the observing staff with the Chief Justice and the Office of the Chief Court Administrator. Although the vast majority of observations have been positive, when corrections are necessary, an action plan is developed and implemented at the local level. The program was featured in a national magazine in the spring of 2012.

The Branch has worked diligently to improve its level of accountability but is still working to implement appropriate performance measures. Much of the next phase of strategic planning will focus on performance measures and evaluating how the changes that have been made support the outcome goals. In keeping with the accountability goal, that process will be made public.

To ensure accountability, the Judicial Branch has:

- Posted on the Judicial Branch [website notices for hearings on Motions to Seal files and documents, and Motions to Close Courtrooms](#).
- Continued to add updated information to the Branch's award-winning web site, [including statistics](#), on a consistent basis. The public can view case numbers and outcomes related to juvenile, civil, family, criminal, motor vehicle, small claims and foreclosure cases, as well as data related to interpreter services, DUI cases, jury administration, juvenile detention, and arrest warrants.
- Introduced legislation enabling the Branch to include Judge Trial Referees in the Judicial Performance Evaluation Program which passed this legislative session. The distribution of questionnaires in matters handled by Judge Trial Referees is underway.
- Engaged the services of the [National Center for State Courts](#) to conduct a review of various aspects of the Judicial Performance Evaluation Program, including, but not limited to, the electronic questionnaire for high volume courts and the integration of questions on fairness and equality and settlement into the program.
- Piloted, statewide, an electronic questionnaire for high volume courts.
- Based upon established criteria, members of the bar who appear before Judges in Geographical Area (G.A.) courts from September 2012 through February 2013 will be provided with an opportunity to access electronic questionnaires through the E-Services website in March 2013.
- Established and posted online guidelines about the appointment process for motor vehicle/small claims magistrates. Additionally, new appointees participate in a training program and have access to online logistical, legal and educational resources. Moving forward, new appointees are subject to courtroom evaluation before reappointment.

In sum, the work done by the Public Service and Trust Commission provided the Judicial Branch with a blueprint for current operations and, perhaps as importantly, encourages long-range planning based on trends identified by court users in the focus groups. The committees and workgroups that developed specific recommendations invested thousands of hours collaborating and creating activities that could be implemented and not simply be written off as good, but unrealistic, ideas. The Plan's innovative approach to justice, with its focus on inclusion and accountability also helped the Judicial Branch to

secure federal grants from the federally-funded [State Justice Institute](#) to develop programs focused on staff training, and on assisting self-represented parties.

Much of what has been recommended, begun or accomplished in the last few years under the Plan is the result of the outward focus of the strategic planning process. Yet, that focus would not be possible without the dedication of Judges and Branch staff who believe in the honor of public service, view their investments in change as necessary to a healthy judiciary, and are willing to be part of the Plan's implementation.

Judges and staff are on the front lines and see first-hand that courts are increasingly filled with people who are representing themselves in cases, particularly in family, small claims, and foreclosure cases. The numbers bear this out: in fiscal year 2011, 85 percent of family cases had at least one self-represented party, while 28 percent of civil cases involve a self-represented party. Self-represented individuals have argued cases at both [the Supreme Court](#) and [the Appellate Court](#), something that would have been unheard of just a few short years ago. And our [Court Service Centers](#) and Public Information Desks serve, on average, in excess of 300,000 [self-represented parties](#) and tens of thousands of attorneys every year.

In recognition of these changing demographics of court users, and with the Strategic Plan as its basis, the Branch is changing its approach to certain [forms](#) and [publications](#). As updates are made to reflect changes in Practice Book rules or statutes, the Branch has adopted plain language wherever possible. And when new brochures or booklets are developed, staff members are encouraged to use plain language. Legal Services has been updating the most commonly used forms, such as [Fee Waiver applications](#), with question mark hyperlinks that direct the user to a [help text](#) that even more fully breaks down legalese into common words. The Branch also recently developed a [color-coded quick reference card](#) for self-represented people who file a small claims suit that is designed to guide the individual through the process in a simple-to-read, user-friendly manner.

Modifying forms is just an example of the staff investment in the Strategic Plan's outcome goal to better serve the public. During the last five years, new ideas begat more new ideas thanks, in large part, to the experiences and voices of Judges and Branch staff.

The examples of activities provided in the previous pages are truly a small sampling of the work that has been done and is still ongoing. The Strategic Plan's five outcome goals of access, changing demographics, delivery of services, accountability and collaboration will continue to drive Branch operations forward and guide us in the next Strategic Plan, which is currently in development.

What Is Next in the Strategic Planning Process:

Performance Measures, Human Resources and Re-engineering Court Processes

The accomplishments of the last five years have given us an excellent basis for the new plan, which will focus on performance measures, human capital (or human resources), and re-engineering court processes.

Performance measures are crucial in the next Strategic Plan because they will help the Branch learn whether the changes that have been made are supporting the outcome goals or whether new initiatives should be undertaken. One such program that will be utilized for the implementation of performance measures is the Courthouse Observation Team (COT), described earlier. The data collected by Observation Team will serve as a baseline to measure whether we are successful in meeting the Strategic Plan's accountability goal of ensuring a system "where all participants can expect and experience clear, fair and consistent justice..."

The implementation of the Strategic Plan has already resulted in some changes in court processes and is spurring the new Plan's focus on re-engineering. Technology is forever changing how business is conducted within the court system. Judges can now listen to audio in their chambers without having to wait for a court reporter to read back testimony. They can also read motions and rule on them at nearly anytime of the day or night, just as attorneys can electronically file and view documents at their convenience.

The advent of civil e-filing has meant that most civil cases are becoming paperless, eliminating the need for a data terminal operator to take the paper documents and enter them into the computer system. Documents in paperless cases are available to view online within a courthouse, allowing anyone to go to their local courthouse to see documents in a file on a public computer at a Court Service Center, Public Information Desk, law library, or clerk's office. A person no longer needs to wait in line at the clerk's office to see a file and the clerk is free to assist people with questions, respond to phone inquiries, and more quickly process court orders.

The re-engineering process will be intrinsically tied to technology, and its impact on the operation of clerk's offices, courtroom services, and services to the public and the bar cannot be overstated. As the Branch moves to a wholly paperless environment, not only will we need to upgrade our technology systems and infrastructure, but also we will need to train and possibly redeploy our staff within offices to ensure efficiencies and make the best use of technological time savers.

Judges and Judicial Branch staff will play important roles in re-engineering as they bring focus and knowledge to identify what will work efficiently and what will not. We have learned in the course of implementing the Strategic Plan that the Bench and bar are increasingly technologically savvy and the public is more electronically connected. Virtually all people with an interest in justice and the courts utilize technology to access information and resources, and they all expect easy and immediate access to information.

Leadership in utilizing technology, for instance, has come from the Judges' Advisory Committee on E-Filing, which has been the leader over the last several years in guiding the Branch from the idea of electronic filing to its reality for the bar and soon, for other members of the public. The Committee has worked closely with the Judicial Branch's information technology teams, who have been unmatched in their willingness to take on the development of the electronic filing and case management systems, and the secure maintenance of the nearly infinite volumes of online material.

It is notable that re-engineering under the new plan is closely aligned with making optimal use of our most important internal resource: our people. It cannot be overstated how critical Judges and Branch staff have been in developing the Strategic Plan, designing creative and meaningful activities that have helped level the playing field for court users, and implementing changes that, at times, have been challenging.

Many of the Branch's current job descriptions were developed years ago and do not accurately reflect the changing needs of the public, the demands of our stakeholders, the impact of existing and emerging technologies on job tasks and performance, or the economy in which we operate. Therefore, it is time for the Judicial Branch to closely examine those job descriptions and how they relate to the world in which we now live and operate.

In order to motivate and keep our existing staff and to continue to attract other talented individuals we must ensure that there are meaningful career paths within the Branch that both satisfy staff needs and nurture a dedication to providing the best and most efficient public service possible.

Going forward, the next phase of strategic planning will focus not only on performance measures of programs, and the reengineering of court procedures, but also on the responsibilities, performance and development of our staff. As we evolve to meet new challenges, we will encourage the staff to invest in the ongoing development of their talents and abilities. We will continue to provide opportunities for them to use those talents and abilities to enhance and improve service to the public. We will continue to empower people to use their abilities in creative ways that support our mission and goals, while remaining true to our values of fairness, respect, integrity and professionalism.



Report to
The Public Service and Trust Commission
December 2012