

The Task Force on Judicial Branch Planning conducted an extensive outreach in 2008 to the general public, court users, attorneys, judges, and court personnel for purposes of gathering information to assist in developing the long-range strategic plan. Nearly 11,000 people in Florida participated in the outreach and survey efforts. The outreach included the following activities:

Public Opinion Telephone Survey

A survey of randomly-selected adult residents of Florida was conducted in January and February 2008. The purpose of the telephone interviews was to examine the public's experiences with and attitudes about Florida's courts. The survey was originally developed in the fall of 2007, building on Florida's public opinion telephone survey conducted in 1996 and other public opinion surveys used in a variety of state and trial courts across the United States. The survey questions were further refined and reduced in number with the selected vendor prior to administering in 2008. OpinionWorks, an external survey research firm located in Maryland, conducted all of the telephone interviews in either English or Spanish. The interviews averaged ten minutes in length. A total of 2,054 people completed the telephone interviews. There is a high level of confidence that the survey results accurately reflect the views of Florida's residents due to the sampling methodology and the large sample size.

Surveys of Jurors, Court Users, Attorneys, Judicial Officers, and Court Personnel

Between May and August 2008, surveys were conducted of jurors, court users, attorneys, judicial officers, and court staff across Florida. The purpose of these surveys was to gather the opinions and understand the experiences of people who use and work in the courts. These surveys also were developed in the fall of 2007 along with the public opinion telephone survey. All of the surveys included the same questions where feasible for comparison purposes. However, these surveys included additional questions about court users' opinions and experiences while at court. The survey questions were further refined and reduced in number prior to survey administration in 2008.

A total of 8,768 people completed these online and paper surveys. The Strategic Planning Unit, working in collaboration with chief judges, court administrators, clerks of court, justice system partners, and the leadership of The Florida Bar, administered the surveys to these targeted groups over a 3-4 month period. The large sample size and the diversity of respondents yielded results that are useful and provide great insights into the views and experiences of court users, judicial officers, and court staff throughout Florida.

Public Forums

Nine public forums – town hall meetings – were held in communities across Florida in October and November 2008. The purpose of the public forums was to hear the views and concerns of local citizens, community organizations, and others who have an interest or stake in Florida's courts. The public forums were held in convenient, community-oriented locations such as public libraries and community colleges. They also were held in diverse communities and locations, which were selected to provide a wide representation of population, demographics, and court presence. The nine communities were: (1) Pensacola; (2) Live Oak; (3) Jacksonville; (4) Sanford; (5) Orlando; (6) St. Petersburg; (7) Ft. Myers; (8) Port St. Lucie; and (9) Miami. Approximately 200 people attended the public forums, including citizens, community leaders, advocacy groups, treatment providers, universities/colleges, private and public attorneys, state legislators, city and county commissioners, and justice system partners. To increase attendance, the meetings were held late in the afternoon and went into the evening hours. The 87 people who spoke provided over 20 hours of testimony on a wide range of issues.

Appendix A—Outreach Activities

Justice System Partners Meeting

In January 2009, 27 leaders representing a variety of justice system and partner agencies participated in a day-long, facilitated meeting to explore common issues related to the justice system. Participants included leadership representatives among law enforcement, corrections, juvenile justice, defense attorneys, prosecutors, civil practitioners, legal services, clerks of court, business leaders, and county government. The focus of the meeting was discussion of the most significant trends and challenges facing the courts and participants' organizations in the next 3 to 5 years and identifying the highest priority issues facing the participants' organizations. A member of the Task Force on Judicial Branch Planning facilitated this meeting.

This section provides a summary of the data and information gathered from all of the outreach and survey efforts. It includes findings and themes of each outreach activity and a comparison of the 2008 survey results across the five survey groups (general public, juror, court user, attorneys, judges/court staff) where possible. When interpreting the data/information, it is important to remember the following points:

- Answers were scored on a five-point scale, with “one” being the least positive response and “five” being the most positive;
- The higher the mean score, the more positive the overall responses were to that question; and
- The midpoint of the rating scale is 3.00. An average rating of above 3.00 reflects more positive views and an average rating of below 3.00 reflects more negative views.

Public Opinion Telephone Survey

Following are several key findings from the public opinion survey. It should be noted that additional findings are provided from the public opinion survey later in this report, comparing results to the other four groups surveyed.

Sources of Information about the Courts

- About a quarter of those surveyed have sought information about the courts. They were most likely to visit a court's website or go to the courthouse in-person for information. A much smaller number called the Court, asked an attorney, visited a library or bookstore, or conferred with family or friends.
- Those who had not sought court-related information indicated that if they needed to get such information, they too would go to a court's website or go to the courthouse in-person for information.
- A majority of respondents found the information they obtained as “extremely or very useful.” Most useful was the information they received from a court's website or from a person at the courthouse.