

The Long-Range Strategic Plan for the Florida Judicial Branch

Taking Bearings, Setting Course

**Judicial
MANAGEMENT
Council**

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This document is an abridged version of *Taking Bearings, Setting Course: The Long-Range Strategic Plan for the Florida Judicial Branch*. This version includes the full text of the vision, mission, long-range issues, goals, strategies, and desired outcomes as they are presented in the full, unabridged version. The unabridged version includes more detail about the strategic planning process, as well as information about specific trends affecting the judicial branch. It also elaborates upon each of the five long-range issues. Finally, the unabridged version includes appendices that record the ideas of participants who attended the many workshops hosted by the Judicial Management Council while this plan was under development.

For the unabridged version of this long-range strategic plan, contact:

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Letter from the Chief Justice:

On behalf of the Supreme Court of Florida, I am pleased to present *Taking Bearings, Setting Course: The Long-Range Strategic Plan for the Florida Judicial Branch*. This is the first ever comprehensive, branch-wide strategic plan for Florida's State Courts System. In the summer of 1996, when the gavel of the Chief Justice of Florida's judicial branch was passed to me, the completion of a long-range strategic plan was identified as a priority of the highest order. And so I am very pleased now, as my tenure comes to a close, to present the fruit of this endeavor.

The long-range strategic plan comes, in the first place, in response to a mandate of the Constitution of the State of Florida, as amended by the citizens in 1992, that requires the judicial branch to develop a long-range plan. Furthermore, this plan responds to the need, articulated by many in our branch, for a clear assessment of the major challenges confronting our courts and for a sound, thoughtful, systematic approach to addressing these challenges. This plan meets both of these purposes. As the name suggests, *Taking Bearings, Setting Course* is an assessment of where our courts are as we close the 20th Century, an articulation of where they need to go, and a description of how they will get there. It begins with expressions of the vision and mission of our judicial branch, and articulates five broad, underlying issues facing it. The strategic plan further identifies fourteen general goals to address these issues, and offers thirty-seven specific strategies to meet the stated goals. This plan is a call for substance, action and sustained commitment.

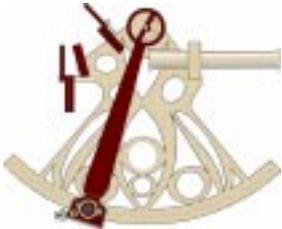
Taking Bearings, Setting Course represents only one part of the strategic planning efforts of the Judicial Management Council. This long-range strategic plan will be supplemented by a series of biennial operational plans that identify specific, short-term objectives to advance the long-range goals of the plan. My administration was guided by an interim operational plan. My successors as Chief Justice will benefit from branch-wide operational plans that derive from and are linked to the long-range strategic plan.



This plan was produced through the hard work of many, many individuals over a period of three years. Foremost among those who contributed to this effort is the late Earle Zehmer, Chief Judge of the First District Court of Appeal. Judge Zehmer was the leader and driving force behind this work, chairing the Steering Committee on Long-Range/Strategic Planning from its creation in 1995 until his passing in 1996. Judge Zehmer was succeeded as chair of this committee by Joseph Farina, Chief Judge of the 11th Circuit. Judge Farina has done an excellent job in leading the committee and the full Judicial Management Council through the long, deliberative process that has led to the product you hold in your hands. The members of this committee, who met some 17 times over the past three years, are owed a debt of gratitude for their diligent and thoughtful work as they wrestled to articulate and address the most difficult issues facing our courts and our citizens.

Special thanks are also in order to the hundreds of judges, court staff, attorneys, government officials, and members of the public who generously contributed their ideas, time, and support to the Council throughout the development of the plan. And finally, thanks are due to the staff of the Office of the State Courts Administrator, who ably support the Judicial Management Council and its many important functions.

Once again, I am pleased to present to the judicial branch and to the people of Florida Taking Bearings, Setting Course: The Long-Range Strategic Plan for the Florida Judicial Branch.



Sincerely,

Gerald Kogan, Chief Justice,

Chairman, Judicial Management Council



INTRODUCTION

All people are united by a desire for justice. Our courts are the primary formal institution we have created to meet this desire. The challenge of providing justice has always been great and, as we move into a new century, becomes yet greater. It is the task of those committed to justice to prepare for the challenges yet to come. *Taking Bearings, Setting Course: The Long-Range Strategic Plan for the Florida Judicial Branch* was developed to guide Florida's courts into that future.

The judicial system today is confronted by a rapidly changing world, characterized by:

- profound social, economic, political and technological changes;
- increasingly complex and interdependent laws and statutory schemes;
- unsurpassed demands and expectations on the part of court users and the public;
- heightened tensions attributable to user expectations that courts carry out traditional functions while assuming new roles and responsibilities;
- unprecedented scrutiny of judicial system performance by legislative bodies, the news media, and the public, particularly in high profile cases; and

- diminished public trust and confidence in government and in the judicial system.

Over the past decade, Florida's judicial branch, like court systems across the nation, has been touched by these sweeping new challenges and pressures. It has felt the effects of the changing environment and the increasing tensions attributable to accommodating change while also retaining the traditional purposes, responsibilities, and fundamental values of the courts.

At the same time, the work of the courts has grown more diverse and complex. The types of services that courts are expected to offer have changed, and now include, among others, mediation, assistance to self-represented litigants, and specialized court divisions. The burden of funding these services is often left to local governments, resulting in inequities between jurisdictions and, in some areas, the inability to meet the expectations of court users and the public.

Until now, the ability of the judicial branch to assess its environment, anticipate change, and maintain a steady course has been limited. There was no strategic planning requirement for Florida's judicial branch until recently, and branch-wide planning was neither comprehensive nor systematic. This has

INTRODUCTION



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The long-range strategic plan is designed to help the judicial branch navigate consciously and deliberately into the new century.



changed in the 1990s. In 1992, the people of Florida amended the state constitution to require the development of long-range plans for all state agencies and for the judicial branch. While no law to implement the planning requirement has been enacted, the Supreme Court of Florida has responded to this constitutional mandate. The Court directed the Judicial Management Council to develop a long-range plan for the judicial branch. This strategic plan is the product of that effort.

Taking Bearings, Setting Course was developed through an extensive and inclusive process. The Judicial Management Council began the strategic planning process with a statewide visioning conference in February 1996 that was attended by Council members, representatives from all three branches of government, community leaders, and members of the general public. After the visioning phase, the Council traveled the state, hosting regional workshops and making presentations to committees, students, and professional groups. Over 400 persons attended regional workshops, and hundreds of additional judges, state attorneys, public defenders, mediators, and students took part in workshops or heard presentations. The ideas of all participants were weighed by the Council as they developed the long-range strategic plan.

The resulting long-range strategic plan is designed to help the judicial branch navigate consciously and deliberately into the new century. *Taking Bearings, Setting Course* will help guide the judicial branch by:

- defining the judicial branch's long-term vision and mission;
- identifying and describing salient long-range issues; and
- articulating goals and strategies for addressing each of the long-range issues.

To ensure implementation of this long-range strategic plan, the Judicial Management Council has developed an integrated strategic planning structure. In conjunction with this long-range strategic plan, the Council develops two-year *operational plans* that define a more specific short-term agenda for the judicial branch. The operational plans identify the priorities of the branch and guide the primary activities of the courts system by linking the ongoing work of the branch to short-term operational objectives and long-range goals. An implementation planning infrastructure operates at the committee, project, or activity level to direct judicial branch resources, while ensuring the alignment of judicial branch activities with the long-range goals and operational objectives.

VISION AND MISSION

Taking Bearings, Setting Course begins with vision. A *vision statement* helps an organization develop a picture of how it wants to operate or what it desires to become in the future. It defines what an organization would aspire to when it performs at its best. In addition to describing a desired future state, the vision statement for the Florida judicial branch is also an expression of the organization's fundamental values.

VISION OF THE FLORIDA JUDICIAL BRANCH

Justice in Florida will be accessible, fair, effective, responsive, and accountable.

To be ***accessible***, the Florida justice system will be convenient, understandable, timely, and affordable to everyone.

To be ***fair***, it will respect the dignity of every person, regardless of race, class, gender or other characteristic, apply the law appropriately to the circumstances of individual cases, and include judges and court staff that reflect the community's diversity.

To be ***effective***, it will uphold the law and apply rules and pro-

cedures consistently and in a timely manner, resolve cases with finality, and provide enforceable decisions.

To be ***responsive***, it will anticipate and respond to the needs of all members of society, and provide a variety of dispute resolution methods.

To be ***accountable***, the Florida justice system will use public resources efficiently, and in a way that the public can understand.

VISION



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The plan then defines the mission of the judicial branch. A *mission statement* defines an organization's purpose. It helps an organization focus on what is truly important and serves as a reference point for developing and prioritizing goals and strategies. An organization's mission statement typically reflects its mandates and the expectations of those who work in or are served by the organization.

MISSION OF THE FLORIDA JUDICIAL BRANCH

The mission of the judicial branch is to protect rights and liberties, uphold and interpret the law, and provide for the peaceful resolution of disputes.

MISSION



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LONG-RANGE ISSUES, GOALS, AND STRATEGIES

The long-range strategic plan identifies the goals and strategies necessary to achieve the vision and fulfill the mission of the judicial branch. The goals and strategies in *Taking Bearings, Setting Course* are organized around five long-range issues. *Long-range issues* are high priority strategic areas that must be addressed over the long term in order to achieve the vision and fulfill the mission. *Goals* refer to desired end states; *strategies* refer to methods of achieving these goals or end states. Also noted are *desirable outcomes* that allow evaluation of progress toward the stated goals.

Long-Range Issue #1: Clarifying the Role of the Judicial Branch

Issue Description. *Florida's courts are being called on to provide an increasingly broad range of services in response to the needs of citizens and the inability of other societal institutions to meet these needs. Many of these expanded services go beyond the historic roles and responsibilities of courts. A consensus over the roles and responsibilities the courts should fulfill would give the judicial branch a clear mandate around which to organize its energies and resources and would reinforce the principle of an independent judiciary.*

Goal 1.1 The role and responsibilities of Florida's judicial branch will be clearly defined.

Strategies:

- 1.1(a) Build consensus on the appropriate roles and responsibilities of the judicial branch and of court officials.
- 1.1(b) Create a strategic management structure that effectuates the mission and vision of the judicial branch based on a clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the courts.
- 1.1(c) Clearly define the mission of each major area of litigation or division of the courts, the core processes and court functions of each area or division, and the outcomes or results each area or division is striving to achieve.

Goal 1.2 The roles and responsibilities of the courts will be widely understood.

Strategies:

- 1.2(a) Communicate and educate those who work in the courts, including judges, staff, and attorneys, about the roles and responsibilities of the courts and of court officials.

LONG-RANGE ISSUES, GOALS, AND STRATEGIES



**Long-Range
Issue #1:
Clarifying the
Role of the
Judicial Branch**



- 1.2(b) Actively promote the establishment of comprehensive education and outreach programs to the public, particularly in partnership with educational institutions, to communicate the roles and responsibilities of courts.

Goal 1.3 *Essential court-related services that are not within the roles or responsibilities of the courts will be provided by organizations outside of the judicial branch.*

Strategies:

- 1.3(a) Identify court-related services currently provided by the courts that would be more appropriately located outside the judicial branch, and shift responsibility for these services to appropriate private, non-profit, or governmental agencies.
- 1.3(b) Ensure that the needs of court users are understood and addressed by delivery organizations that provide court-related services.

Desirable Outcomes.

By the year 2004, the judicial branch will have:

- developed a clear consensus on the roles and responsibilities of the courts and of court officials;
- created and implemented mechanisms to communicate to court personnel and the public, so that there will be a clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the courts and of court officials;

- identified court-related services that would more appropriately be located outside the boundaries of the judicial branch; and
- facilitated the shifting of appropriate service responsibilities to, or located such services within, more appropriate delivery organizations.

Long-Range Issue #2: Improving the Administration of Justice

Issue Description. *The effective administration of justice requires deliberate attention to the core processes of the judicial branch. Increasing workloads which arise from greater demand for adjudication, alternative dispute resolution, other core processes, and core court functions which support court processes will continue to put pressure on the Florida courts system's ability to fulfill its responsibilities effectively and efficiently.*

Goal 2.1 *The judicial branch will provide a full range of core court processes and dispute resolution options statewide.*

Strategies:

- 2.1(a) Ensure that all jurisdictions are prepared to provide a range of core court processes and dispute resolution options.

2.1(b) Ensure that every court is able to guide users to appropriate core court processes and dispute resolution forums.

Goal 2.2 The judicial branch will fairly and timely resolve issues brought before it.

Strategies:

2.2(a) Enable all courts to develop and implement a case management system that assists courts to resolve cases efficiently and timely consistent with equal protection and due process rights.

2.2(b) Ensure that accurate, timely, and complete information needed to make decisions is available to judges, court staff, attorneys and other parties.

2.2(c) Enhance the ability of courts to effectively enforce compliance with court orders, including collection of fines, fees, and forfeitures.

2.2(d) Courts will have sufficient time to fully consider and explain decisions.

Goal 2.3 Adequate provision will be made for the needs of the court system and funds will be expended prudently

Strategies:

2.3(a) Develop mechanisms to anticipate and assess future resource needs.

2.3(b) Produce budget requests sufficient to carry out the mission of the judicial branch and reflective of the priorities and strategies of the judicial branch long-range and operational plans.

2.3(c) Secure appropriate funding from each funding entity, including state, local, and federal sources.

2.3(d) Determine appropriate judicial branch outcomes and establish performance standards and indicators that measure the performance of the branch.

Desirable Outcomes.

By the year 2004, the judicial branch will have:

- an equitable range of dispute resolution options and other core court processes available in every Florida jurisdiction;
- a case management infrastructure in place to support the effective and efficient movement of cases through the system;
- adequate and appropriate funding of the courts and court services consistent with Article V of the Florida Constitution; and
- a qualitative and quantitative performance measurement system including a process for monitoring, evaluating, and reporting.

**Long-Range
Issue #2:
Improving the
Administration
of Justice**



**Long-Range
Issue #3:
Supporting
Competence
and Quality**



Long-Range Issue #3: Supporting Competence and Quality

***Issue Description.** Justice depends on the quality and competence of those who work within the court system. Floridians deserve a court system staffed with highly competent, skilled judges and administrators. Those who work in Florida's court system deserve a high level of support to prepare them in their work.*

***Goal 3.1** Judges and court personnel will be prepared to administer justice fairly, effectively, and in a professional and competent manner.*

Strategies:

- 3.1(a) Expand judicial education programs to enhance the knowledge, skills, expertise, and personal development of judges.
- 3.1(b) Develop comprehensive training and education programs that enhance the knowledge, skills, expertise, and personal development of court personnel.

***Goal 3.2** Judges and court personnel will serve the diverse population of Florida with respect and without bias.*

Strategies:

- 3.2(a) Enhance the representation of Florida's diverse population in the operations of the judicial branch.

- 3.2(b) Educate all judges and court personnel on issues of diversity and increase understanding of and respect for all people.

***Goal 3.3** Judges, court personnel and members of the bar will adhere to high standards of professionalism, ethics, and personal behavior.*

Strategies:

- 3.3(a) Promote a legal culture that embraces high standards of professionalism, ethics, and personal behavior.
- 3.3(b) Uphold professional codes of conduct for judges, court personnel, and members of the bar.

Desirable Outcomes.

By the year 2004, the judicial branch will have:

- provided comprehensive continuing education to all judges and court staff that enables them to administer the justice system fairly, effectively, and efficiently;
- enhanced the capability of the judicial branch to respond to the needs of people with diverse backgrounds and characteristics;
- increased diversity among judges and court staff; and
- created institutionalized structures that advance the professionalism and ethics of Florida's legal community.

Long-Range Issue #4: Enhancing Public Access and Service

Issue Description. *Justice requires the ability to petition for the redress of injuries, and the right to equal access to the legal system. Barriers to meaningful access to the legal system can result in unequal treatment which can give rise to injustice.*

Goal 4.1 All people will have equal access to courts.

Strategies:

- 4.1(a) Identify and remove procedural barriers to court access.
- 4.1(b) Identify and remove physical barriers to court access.
- 4.1(c) Identify and address communication and language barriers to court access.
- 4.1(d) Identify and remove policies and practices that give rise to bias-related barriers to full access.
- 4.1(e) Identify and address inequities arising from unequal economic resources.
- 4.1(f) Enhance court access through application of new technologies.

Goal 4.2 People will be able to understand and utilize the judicial system.

Strategies:

- 4.2(a) Ensure that every court provides appropriate information and assistance to court users, crime victims, and the general public.
- 4.2(b) Provide a wide range of court services at a single point of access.
- 4.2(c) Provide a variety of electronic and traditional means to conduct court business.
- 4.2(d) Provide information to court users, including victims, about appropriate and available court-related service providers.

Desirable Outcomes.

By the year 2004, the judicial branch will have:

- identified and removed conditions that present barriers to equal access to the courts and court services; and
- enhanced the availability of accurate, helpful, and understandable information to court users, crime victims, and members of the general public.

Long-Range Issue #4: Enhancing Public Access and Service



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**Long-Range
Issue #5:
Building Public
Trust and
Confidence**

Long-Range Issue #5: Building Public Trust and Confidence

***Issue Description.** The independence and legal authority of the courts is a grant by the people. The erosion of public trust and confidence in the courts undermines judicial independence, diminishes the effectiveness of court actions, and reduces the ability of the courts to fulfill their function.*

Goal 5.1 *The judicial system will be accountable to the public.*

Strategies:

- 5.1(a) Establish evaluation and monitoring mechanisms of court performance.
- 5.1(b) Share information about judicial system performance with policy makers, court users, and the public.

Goal 5.2 *The judicial branch will inform the public about the functioning of the courts.*

Strategies:

- 5.2(a) Educate and inform court users and the public about the judicial branch and constitutional and legal principles.

- 5.2(b) Enhance outreach to all levels of educational institutions to improve public understanding of the judicial system.

Goal 5.3 *The judicial branch will be responsive to the expectations of the public regarding the courts.*

Strategies:

- 5.3(a) Develop and institutionalize an ongoing, comprehensive outreach program that solicits information regarding the needs and expectations of court users, crime victims, and the general public.
- 5.3(b) Solicit feedback from court users, crime victims, and the general public regarding their assessment of the judicial branch's performance.



Desirable Outcomes.

By the year 2004, the judicial branch will have:

- systems and procedures that provide accountability to the people of Florida; and
- an institutionalized outreach program to court users, crime victims, and the general public.

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