

**Florida Trial Court Technology Strategic Plan:
2015 - 2019**

Adopted by the Florida Supreme Court

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Trial Court Budget Commission

Trial Court Technology Funding Strategies Workgroup Members

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Note: This strategic plan was developed based on documentation originating from a workshop held August 12-13, 2014, for the trial court administrators and trial court technology officers. The workshop was facilitated by representatives of the National Center for State Courts (NCSC), who have experience developing strategic plans using a formal enterprise-based process of identifying business and technical capabilities for the courts. The NCSC assimilated the discussion notes and provided a draft report to the Office of the State Courts Administrator; whereupon the Trial Court Budget Commission’s Trial Court Technology Funding Strategies Workgroup further refined and packaged the strategic plan at its November 13, 2014, meeting.

Executive Summary

The Florida Constitution vests with the court the duty of adjudicating disputes as well as directing the business and administrative functions of the court. In order to carry out this constitutional mandate, the courts increasingly rely on technology and are constantly evaluating new ways that technology can best be utilized in the judicial branch. The State Courts System (SCS) recognizes that technology and electronic filing have created a paradigm shift – requiring the judicial branch to function differently than in the past. It is imperative to establish long-range technology objectives for the SCS that align with its mission so that management and control of internal operations are coherent and clear to the citizens it serves.

The *Florida Trial Court Technology Strategic Plan: 2015 - 2019* (Plan) establishes the objectives with the purpose of developing a business enterprise approach to addressing the technology needs of the SCS. The Plan: 1) provides a comprehensive view of technology; 2) acknowledges that technology has and will continue to redefine how the courts use information to make decisions; 3) considers technology needs of the trial courts now and in the future; 4) creates a flexible system that can evolve with technology and the public’s needs; 5) proposes a stable and adequate funding structure; and 6) allows the courts to be more self-sufficient.

The Plan identifies the necessary business and corresponding technical capabilities the trial courts must possess in order to function effectively. To arrive at these capabilities, the Plan adopts the court’s constitutional responsibility as its business mission – the “business” of the court is the prompt and fair adjudication of disputes. The following business capabilities were identified as most critical:

Primary Business Capability

Provide a more consistent statewide level of court services by establishing and funding a minimum level of technology to support all elements of the State Courts System enumerated in section 29.004, Florida Statutes.

Supporting Business Capabilities

Implement best practices for funding by incorporating full life cycle costs of all trial court technology which ensures long-range functionality and return on investment.

Sustain the systems and applications in the trial courts by a) ensuring courts have appropriate staffing levels available to support technology demands; and b) improving training and education for staff.

To effectuate the business capabilities identified, the State Courts System must secure adequate and reliable state funding in addition to existing county funding to implement and sustain the technology projects that support these capabilities. The SCS intends to develop, for consideration by the Florida Legislature, a comprehensive funding structure with corresponding revenue proposals that will continually support, maintain, and refresh the SCS technology elements necessary to ensure that trial courts statewide are able to meet the needs of judges, court staff, and the public they serve.

Background

Currently, the trial courts are undergoing a substantial technology transformation. Just as technology has transformed the ways businesses operate and serve customers, it is also transforming the ways the judicial branch functions and meets the needs of its customers – the individuals and businesses who rely upon the courts for the administration of justice and the provision of due process. Citizens, who are accustomed to interacting with businesses in real time via the Internet, expect technology-enhanced performance. Likewise, they increasingly expect their court system to employ technology to facilitate the effective, efficient, and fair disposition of cases.

Over the last five years, the legal system has moved from a paper-based system toward an electronic system. Attorneys are filing cases electronically; judges are beginning to work with electronic case files; and clerks are running their business processes using automation and electronic forms and documents. More services are being provided internally to court system partners and externally to court customers and litigants using online media. Today, technology is no longer a “luxury” or “add-on” to existing resources; it is inherent and inextricably connected to the daily operations of the judiciary.

Florida continues to evolve as a unified and uniform court system with the governance and funding structures in place to support efficient and effective access to justice. The Florida State Courts System (SCS) has made significant strides in developing and implementing technology solutions. However, challenges exist in implementing technology with varied and disparate funding sources and governance mechanisms. The *Florida Trial Court Technology Strategic Plan: 2015 - 2019* (Plan) supports a cohesive process to enhance the ability of the trial courts to provide a more consistent level of services through funding an adequate and reliable minimum level of technology.

As the SCS establishes and implements this Plan, it will be necessary to work with integral external court system partners, such as the clerks of court, to ensure that the clerks’ technology framework supports the SCS constitutional mandate and initiatives. Proper coordination of technical capabilities is critical for successful technology development and maintenance. This Plan is based on the courts’ responsibility for managing its cases, but it also recognizes the necessity of clerks to maintain the integrity and accuracy of court records in their support of the judiciary as established by statutes, court rules, and administrative orders. This Plan contemplates that the trial courts’ technology goals and initiatives will be closely coordinated with the technology needs and initiatives of the clerks of court, so that the court records provided to judges and court staff are accurate, complete, secure, and timely.

The courts sit at the center of activity in the judicial system, with data flowing in and out as cases move through the adjudication process from filing to disposition. Electronic filing set the course for technology in the judicial branch. Then, the development of a statewide court management information system known as the Court Application Processing System, or “CAPS,” was the beginning of the infrastructure needed to effectively manage court business processes. This Plan continues the development of CAPS to provide consistent access to and availability of data across counties and circuits to provide more complete information to judges from different data sources, which improves efficiency in judicial decision-making. These enhancements give the

SCS monitoring tools and allow the courts to tailor performance measures to improve case management and adjudication of cases. Additionally, this Plan recognizes the need for infrastructure to support the statewide flow of information and technology. It provides tools to perform more accurate and reliable court reporting and court interpreting, and staff to support all statewide, court-specific technology systems. Furthermore, it recognizes the necessity for the clerks to provide complete, accurate, secure, real-time access to court data to ensure continuity of operations and information security.

Business Goal

The guidepost for this technology strategic plan is the primary mission or “business” of the courts – protecting rights and liberties, upholding and interpreting the law, and providing for the peaceful resolution of disputes. Because the courts’ constitutional responsibility is to adjudicate cases, this Plan focuses on the authority of the court to promote the prompt and efficient administration of justice and the technological tools needed to effectively manage cases and court resources. The purpose of the Plan is to ensure that technology fully supports the courts’ primary mission and facilitates the ability of the local courts to act together as an enterprise when appropriate.

Process

To avoid the common pitfalls of strategic planning within loosely-coupled organizations such as the SCS, the Office of the State Courts Administrator (OSCA) organized a two-day meeting (Workshop) of the trial court administrators and court technology officers from all 20 judicial circuits in August 2014. With facilitation support from the National Center for State Courts (NCSC), the group identified the guiding principles, identified and prioritized business capabilities, and determined required technical capabilities. Subsequently, the TCBC’s Trial Court Technology Funding Strategies Workgroup (Workgroup) refined the business capabilities and aligned the required technical capabilities to the current tactical and funding plans. This led to identifying and prioritizing necessary business capabilities and corresponding real-world technology solutions.

During the Workshop, several key concepts emerged:

- Efforts exist at all levels of the courts to act more like an integrated system when planning and implementing new technology; however, more needs to be done to perform like an enterprise. In order for judges to adjudicate cases, they must have access to accurate, timely, secure, and complete information. In order for the current information to be most useful, there is a pressing need for real technical standards (data and interfaces) to complement the functional standards the courts have already developed as part of the Integrated Trial Court Adjudicatory System (ITCAS) and Court Application Processing System (CAPS) projects. The data exchange workgroup, which includes clerks of court staff, is currently working on developing specifications for data exchanges, starting with the CAPS viewer.
- Courts provide a wide variety of services to the public and other court stakeholders, but the type and level of services provided are inconsistent across local jurisdictions. The public would benefit from a minimal level of services that is consistently provided statewide and consistently identified using the same terminology.

- New technology generates new expectations. As courts become more electronic and online, the public and other court stakeholders expect access “24/7,” but the courts do not currently have the resources necessary to provide that level of service and support.
- Due to local funding and management, the courts’ ability to present a consistent level of information and services statewide to citizens is hindered. While websites and online services are improving, the SCS still needs to work on presenting a more consistent interface to the public for ease of access to and use of its services.

In addition to the concepts identified by Workshop participants, several business challenges were identified. While not unique to Florida, the following challenges are significant barriers to success:

- There are a number of governing bodies, both internal and external, that are responsible for various aspects of trial court technology.
- Funding resources do not match expected levels of service.
- Levels of service provided are not consistent across the state, even at a minimum level.
- Access to court information is not standardized, complete, or timely.
- Training in technology is needed for staff.

To address key concepts and challenges identified by the Workshop participants, guiding principles were established to mitigate or overcome these challenges. Participants decided the following principles would clarify court priorities and provide a rationale for selection:

1. There should be clear court authority over trial court technology.
2. Resource planning should be prioritized based on business needs.
3. Funding levels should match defined and required levels of service.
4. There should be a consistent minimum level of court services provided across the state. Because resources of local courts will always vary to some extent, this fourth principle is intended to support a consistent *minimally acceptable* level of services statewide. It is intended to establish a floor for available services – not a ceiling or a rigid level.
5. Access to court information should be standardized, complete, and near real-time.
6. Staff supporting court technology should be competent and well-trained.

Business Capabilities for Technology

This Plan does not attempt to identify all required or desired business capabilities. The intent is to identify and prioritize the most needed capabilities. This Plan focuses on one primary business capability and two supporting business capabilities that were recognized by the Workshop participants and selected as most critical by the Workgroup members. It is reasonable that a successful campaign can be mobilized over multiple years to support all three. They are as follows:

Primary Business Capability

Provide a more consistent statewide level of court services by establishing and funding a minimum level of technology to support all elements of the State Courts System enumerated in section 29.004, Florida Statutes.

Supporting Business Capabilities

Implement best practices for funding by incorporating full life cycle costs of all trial court technology which ensures long-range functionality and return on investment.

Sustain the systems and applications in the trial courts by a) ensuring courts have appropriate staffing levels available to support technology demands; and b) improving training and education for staff.

Alignment of Business Capabilities with Technical Capabilities and Success Measures

This section identifies, for each business capability, the technical capabilities required for implementation. One or more success measures are specified for each desired business capability since it is important to know, in business terms, what constitutes successful implementation.

Primary Business Capability – Technical capabilities addressing consistent level of court services.

Discussion: The scope encompasses all systems and applications in the trial courts including the Court Application Processing System, remote interpreting and expert witness systems, and systems that allow the courts to accurately make the official court record. This capability requires the establishment of statewide standardization of minimum levels of required core court technology services.

- Identify common services.
- Determine the core minimum service levels required.
- Develop minimum standards for technical support of common services and service levels.
- Estimate adequate enterprise funding needs for required services and service levels:
 - Based on state and county funding,
 - Based on funding requirements for circuit-wide functions that cross county boundaries.
- Continue development of the statewide Court Application Processing System that provides consistent access to and availability of information across counties and circuits.
- Identify and develop specifications for standard data exchanges – both internal and external.
 - Standardize data definitions and data entry rules for key court information.
 - Establish internal user support groups for existing systems and applications.
- Identify and provide a consistent statewide level (or several defined levels) of services for remote interpreting and remote expert witnesses (functional requirements, availability of

qualified staff, network bandwidth, internal court wiring, etc.), which allows for pooling of limited resources for certified interpreter and expert witnesses. This will provide a more cost effective and consistent level of services across the state.

- Install replacements and provide adequate continuing maintenance for standards-based videoconferencing equipment to support use of remote interpretation and remote expert witnesses as needed.
- Identify and provide a consistent statewide level of services for digital audio/video recording, to include the expansion of digital court reporting equipment in necessary courtrooms and hearing rooms not already outfitted with the technology.
- Install replacements and provide adequate continuing maintenance for standards-based digital court reporting equipment, to ensure consistent capturing of the official record across all circuits.
- Provide contract consultants through OSCA as a last resort for small circuits/counties with minimal required services and inadequate funding and technology resources.

Success Measures:

- Citizens have access to a consistent level of minimum court services, regardless of geography.
- The official court record is made in an accurate and reliable manner statewide.
- Court interpreter and expert witness requests are met in a timely manner with certified or qualified staff, increasing efficiency and effectiveness and may also result in cost savings.
- Judges receive complete, accurate, secure, and real-time information from various data sources resulting in efficiency gains in judicial decision-making.
- Reliance on paper files and manual file movement is reduced.

Supporting Business Capability – Technical capabilities addressing life cycle funding.

Discussion: This best practice identifies complete life cycle costs for all proposed projects and includes cost/benefit analyses. The scope includes proactive analysis of information technology resource needs and planning to avoid operating in a reactive mode. Development of funding proposals should be conducted using an enterprise approach, with adequate oversight over technology and accountability of financial resources.

- Identify and support the ongoing development and implementation of an enterprise view of technology for the judicial branch.
- Plan strategically for deployment of technology, utilizing limited resources.
- Implement a circuit-level funding structure that includes a dedicated, statewide trust fund for trial court technology, managed by the Trial Court Budget Commission.

Success Measures:

- Technology needs are evaluated to include full life cycle costs.
- Resources are managed in a proactive manner.
- Technology is acquired and deployed in a strategic manner statewide; systems are refreshed prior to reaching obsolescence.

Supporting Business Capability – Technical capabilities addressing staffing and training.

Discussion: Current levels of technology staff support vary across circuits and counties. There are competing priorities for limited shared resources paid for by the county. Additionally, multi-county circuits have difficulties in sharing resources across county lines or providing the same services within the circuit due to variations in county support of staff. A lot of the new technology initiatives are court specific and need dedicated, well-trained staff to support.

- Provide a minimum level of information technology staff in all 20 judicial circuits to ensure circuit-level dedicated resources to support all statewide, court-specific technology systems.
- Acquire additional commercial automated/online training resources for judicial officers and staff to ensure that technology is equally utilized and fully supported statewide.
- Acquire additional or improved training modules for vendor-provided court applications.
- Establish an enterprise usability lab for court applications and websites.
- Create a comprehensive set of online functional training modules for court staff.
- Identify technical training shortfalls for information technology staff as technology needs evolve.

Success Measures:

- Judges and court staff receive timely assistance from knowledgeable technical support staff.
- Court staff receive education and training to maintain contemporary knowledge of technical systems and applications, resulting in overall process improvement.
- Court staff retention is improved, resulting in human resource-related cost savings.

Alignment of Capabilities and Projects

The desired business and technical capabilities in this Plan build on current capabilities and planned projects. Some key examples are listed below:

- Some courts have implemented due process capabilities (remote interpreters, digital audio/video recording) over the last several years. The need is to complete the rollouts statewide and provide life cycle funding for maintenance and replacement.
- The Judicial Inquiry System (JIS) provides statewide information to courts on criminal cases. There is a need for equivalent information in civil and family cases. The Integrated Trial Court Adjudicatory System (ITCAS) project will provide similar capabilities.
- The Court Application Processing System (CAPS) project is a computer application system designed for in-court and in-chambers use by trial court judges and court staff which facilitates work on cases from any location and across many devices and data sources. It provides judges with rapid and reliable access to case information; provides access to and use of case files and other data in the course of managing cases, scheduling

and conducting hearings, adjudicating disputes, and recording and reporting judicial activity; and allows judges to prepare, electronically sign, file, and serve orders. CAPS is vital to the adjudicatory function of Florida's trial court judges and has the potential to serve as the framework for a fully-automated trial court case management system. While the project is already underway, the need is to complete a statewide rollout, establish data and interface standards for improved interoperability, and improve data access from clerks and other court stakeholders.

- The trial courts are responsible for the timely management of their cases. This will become easier with digital-based court information, whereas it was extremely difficult in the paper-based systems. This will help the court move its cases in an efficient and effective manner.
- The courts have benefited from several recent funding opportunities to expand their investment in court technology; however, problems are now arising because the new technology capabilities did not come with life cycle funding to maintain and replace aging equipment.

Conclusion

Members of the public view the court system as a single enterprise; they do not concern themselves with the details of court organization. When courts fail to function like a single enterprise, it inhibits the public's access. Inconsistent services and service interfaces, whether in person at the courthouse or on-line, also impede access. One of the great strengths of the Florida courts is their ability to innovate and experiment at the local level. The goal of this Plan is to achieve a balance of local flexibility, operational efficiency, and public accessibility to provide a consistent statewide level of services to court customers.

The Plan makes no attempt to redesign the way technology is funded at the local level, only to ensure a minimum level of trial court technology services statewide. To effectuate the business capabilities identified in this Plan, it is necessary for the State Courts System to secure adequate and reliable state funding to implement and sustain the technology projects that support these capabilities. During the 2015 legislative session, the SCS will present a proposed comprehensive funding structure with corresponding revenue streams to continually support, maintain, and refresh the technology that is critical to ensuring the trial courts statewide are able to meet the needs of judges, court staff, and the public they serve.

To fully realize the benefits, the courts must follow the guiding principles presented in this Plan to establish a necessary level of court services statewide, present a more consistent face to the public, and work with court partners in aligning technology efforts.