
Strategic Planning Mentoring Guidelines: Practical Tips for Court Leaders

I. Introduction

Since the late 1980s, the State Justice Institute (SJI) has supported national scope, state-specific, and local strategic planning initiatives in state courts.¹ Beginning in 1992, SJI recognized the need for a comprehensive approach to long-range strategic planning for courts. It awarded a grant to the Center for Public Policy Studies (CPPS) to develop a strategic planning approach and process for the nation's state court systems and trial courts. Through the assistance of a national advisory committee, CPPS produced a monograph and training guide to steer court systems through the strategic planning process.²

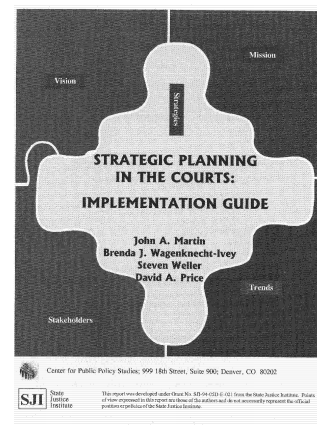
Since then, many courts across the country have developed strategic plans using and adapting this approach. Through the experience of these initiatives, the process has been refined over the years and evolved into a proven nine-step approach to long-range strategic planning. This process has been documented in guidebooks addressing strategic planning and continuous quality improvement.³ The process has also been incorporated into curricula materials addressing the core competencies of court managers by the National Association for Court Management.⁴

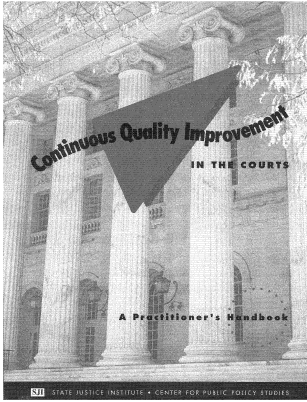
The nine-step strategic planning process is provided on page 3. The steps include:

An Approach to Long Range Strategic Planning for the Courts



SJI has supported the development of a nine-step approach to long-range strategic planning in the courts.



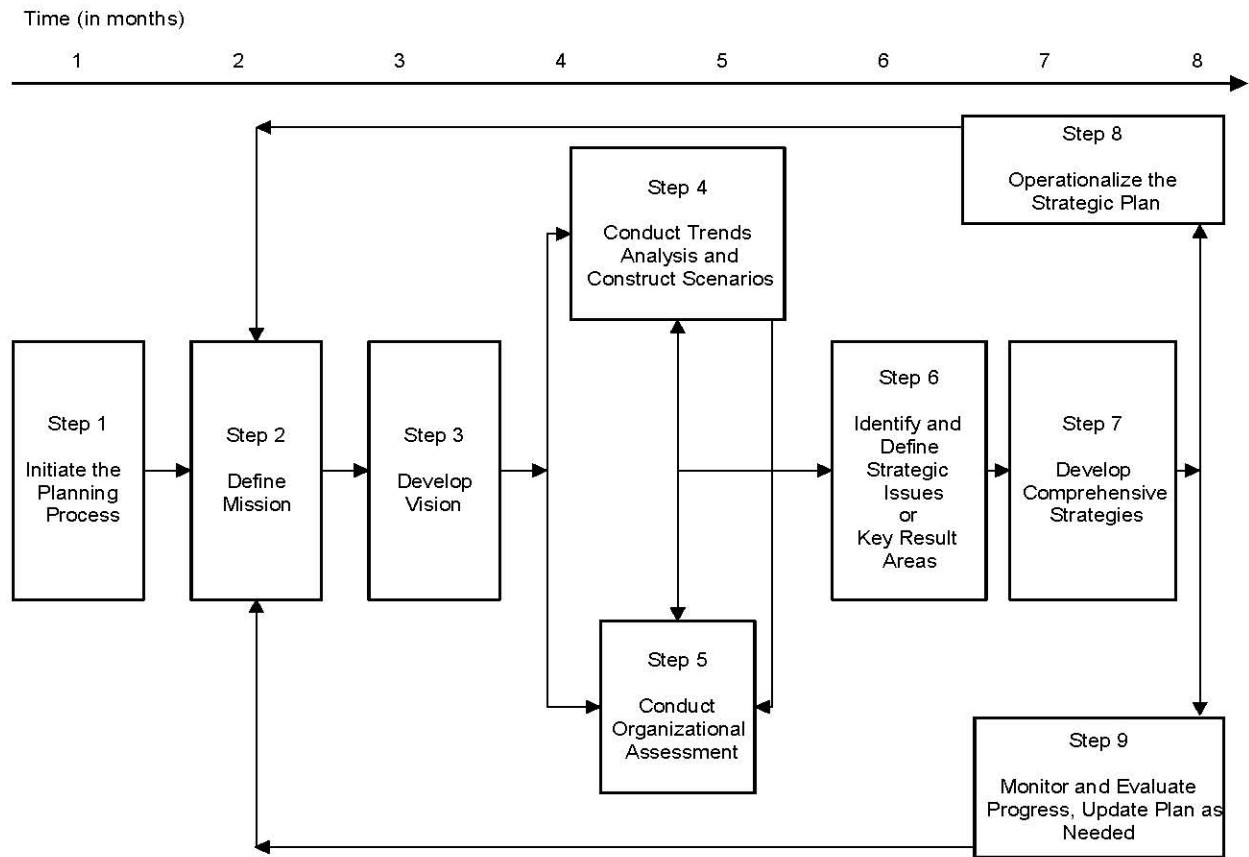


The nine-step approach to long-range strategic planning in the courts was last detailed in this 1998 guide.

1. Initiating and agreeing on a planning process;
2. Defining a mission – or purpose;
3. Developing an inspiring and compelling vision;
4. Conducting a trends analysis and constructing scenarios;
5. Conducting an organizational assessment;
6. Identifying and describing strategic issues or key result areas;
7. Developing comprehensive strategies;
8. Operationalizing the strategic plan – moving from strategic planning to strategic leadership; and
9. Monitoring progress and evaluating results, and updating the plan as needed.

A NINE STEP COURT STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

Long-Range Strategic Planning Process



Trial courts utilizing nine-step process:

Family Division, 8th Judicial Circuit of Florida, Gainesville

11th Judicial Circuit of Florida, Miami

12th Judicial Circuit of Florida, Sarasota

Orange County Superior Court, Santa Ana, California

36th District Court, Detroit, Michigan

King County District Court, Seattle, Washington

Pierce County District Court, Tacoma, Washington

Hennepin County District Court, Minneapolis

State court systems utilizing nine-step process:

Florida
California
Michigan
Wisconsin

The nine-step strategic planning approach has been used in over 50 state and local courts, justice system organizations, and other private and public organizations across the country since 1992. Modified and adapted as needed, the approach has been used in all types of jurisdictions, including:

- ✓ large urban courts;⁵
- ✓ small rural courts;⁶
- ✓ courts/circuits with multiple counties;⁷
- ✓ state court systems;⁸
- ✓ state court administrative offices;⁹ and
- ✓ other justice system agencies and organizations such as public defender's offices, judicial education organizations, and judicial conferences.¹⁰

Some of the aforementioned strategic planning processes have:

- ✓ been community-based or community-focused (i.e., they have included external stakeholders, court users, and public members on the planning teams);¹¹
- ✓ been internally focused with judges, court administrators, court managers and/or court staff within a court/organization on the planning team;¹² and
- ✓ included public and community outreach efforts to elicit the opinions and learn about the needs and expectations of court users and people in the community (e.g., public opinion research, court-community conferences, stakeholder and community focus groups, and court user surveys).¹³

In addition to the Florida State Courts System and several trial courts in Florida, courts in Michigan, California, Washington, Minnesota, and Wisconsin have utilized this process in their strategic planning efforts.¹⁴

For many jurisdictions, the nine-step planning process was very effective, resulting in strategic plans that have been implemented and followed. For these courts, the strategic planning process itself was more than a cerebral exercise. It resulted in significant and tangible benefits to the court.

Successful jurisdictions have invested the time and resources needed to successfully and critically assess where they are today and where they want to go in the future. They developed comprehensive strategies to move in the desired direction. In addition, despite daily crises, other diversions, and a variety of internal and external pressures and forces, they had the wherewithal to implement their plans. For these jurisdictions, the strategic plans served as an effective leadership and management tool, and an agent for change. The plans set forth a roadmap – or a long-term agenda – for the future. The plans not only defined the court’s long term priorities, but also set forth comprehensive strategies – or means – for moving toward a better or ideal future.

The success of these court-based strategic planning initiatives is attributed largely to judges and court administrators who had the necessary foresight, and who were able to convince others, that their courts must change and improve the way they do business. They could see that the political, social, and economic climates were such

Benefits of Strategic Planning

1. Provides focus.
2. Opens up dialogue – internally *and* externally.
3. Helps identify a court’s long-term priorities.
4. Improves and increases performance and accountability.
5. Helps bring judges and other court officials to a common understanding of issues, and to work toward common goals.
6. Enhances relationships with external stakeholders, community groups, and the public.
7. Educates others about the court system.
8. Involves many internal people in determining the court’s long-term direction and in making organizational improvements.
9. Helps to identify and support the need for additional resources.
10. Provides a rationale for making budget, operational, and other management decisions.

that their courts could no longer operate in the future much like they had in the past.

In particular, successful jurisdictions were able to:

- ✓ marshal the necessary commitment and resources to do strategic planning;
- ✓ maintain a high level of interest and commitment during the planning process;
- ✓ secure buy-in and support for the court's long-range strategic plan – its strategic direction and long-term priorities;
- ✓ maintain continuity between rotating judicial leadership;
- ✓ remain focused and not stray too far from the strategic plan despite daily crises and other internal and external forces;
- ✓ involve many judges, court staff, other justice system agencies and leaders, and members of the community in the planning and implementation processes;
- ✓ link the budget directly to the long-range strategic plan;
- ✓ align the day-to-day behaviors, activities, and attitudes of judges, administrators, managers, and staff with the strategic plan;
- ✓ gain and sustain organizational momentum; and
- ✓ monitor progress and evaluate accomplishments and results.

For a few courts and jurisdictions, the strategic planning process was less effective and the resulting strategic plans have not been very useful. For them, a great deal of time and resources were invested in a strategic planning process that did not reap much benefit to the court or organization. In these court organizations, the strategic plans

were not implemented at all or in part largely because state or local court leaders were *not* able to get others to:

- ✓ see the need to do court business or provide court services differently;
- ✓ commit to a comprehensive, long-range planning process;
- ✓ believe in and/or see the value of doing strategic planning;
- ✓ commit or secure buy-in to the plan;
- ✓ agree on a common, long-term direction or long-term priorities of the court;
- ✓ focus on the strategic plan; or
- ✓ change the way the court/organization goes about its business.

Consequently, little was implemented and/or followed through on. For these courts, despite going through a lengthy and comprehensive strategic planning process, it was business as usual – little changed or improved as a result of the planning process and/or the strategic plan.

Purpose of the Mentoring Guidelines

Through these many and diverse experiences, the authors have: (1) learned what it takes to do strategic planning successfully; and (2) identified things that can derail successful planning efforts. In particular, they have:

-
- ✓ learned and identified many practical tips and lessons that contribute to successful planning processes and meaningful plans being developed and implemented; and
 - ✓ developed numerous useful tools that can be used by other jurisdictions as they embark on similar long-range strategic planning efforts.

The Purpose of the *Mentoring Guidelines* is to :

Provide judges, court administrators, and other court leaders with practical tips and easy-to-use resources to develop and follow through on long-range strategic plans.

In essence, the *Mentoring Guidelines* lay out a cognitive roadmap for doing strategic planning in all types of courts and/or communities. They provide readers/users with a link to a multitude of resources regarding both the process of doing strategic planning and the substance of strategic planning. The *Mentoring Guidelines* are designed to:

- ✓ help court leaders make informed choices throughout all phases of the strategic planning process (i.e., when getting started, throughout the process, and when implementing the plan); and
- ✓ provide court leaders and others who might be assisting courts with their planning processes with a variety of tools and

resources to help organize and facilitate planning efforts and draft the court's strategic plan.

The *Mentoring Guidelines* include:

- ✓ lessons learned;
- ✓ questions to consider;
- ✓ practical do's and don'ts;
- ✓ what works and what does not work;
- ✓ what to look for and what to avoid;
- ✓ critical process decisions;
- ✓ successful options for doing strategic planning with judges and court leaders in Florida and elsewhere;
- ✓ useful tools such as checklists, and references to samples and templates; and
- ✓ linkages to other strategic planning and related resources.

In sum, the *Mentoring Guidelines* will help – increase the knowledge, skills, and abilities of – those who want to:

- (1) engage in a successful and ongoing strategic planning process;
- (2) develop a strategic plan that is meaningful, helpful, and advantageous to the organization; and
- (3) link and /or align a trial court strategic plan with a state court strategic plan.

The *Mentoring Guidelines* are organized as follows:

- ✓ **Section II: Overview of Long-Range Strategic Planning in Florida's Judicial Branch** includes Florida's approach to judicial branch and trial court planning, and the interrelationships among different types of plans;
- ✓ **Section III: Deciding to do Long-Range Strategic Planning** identifies important areas to consider when deciding whether to embark on long-range strategic planning;
- ✓ **Section IV: Getting Started** includes tips and checklists for beginning the planning process and getting underway;
- ✓ **Section V: Facilitating the Strategic Planning Process & Implementing the Strategic Plan** provides many resources and must do's for each step of the strategic planning process, and ideas on how to move from strategic planning to strategic leadership and implementation; and
- ✓ **Section VI: Conclusion.**