

STATE OF MICHIGAN  
COUNTY OF OTTAWA

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20th Circuit Court  
Probate Court



# 2008 – 2010 Strategic Plan

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Revised 12/08



**20<sup>th</sup> JUDICIAL CIRCUIT &  
OTTAWA COUNTY PROBATE COURTS**

**2008-2010 Strategic Plan**

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

Acknowledgements .....	ii
Strategic Planning Oversight Team Members .....	iii
20th Circuit Court Organizational Chart .....	iv
Ottawa County Probate Court Organizational Chart .....	v

**STRATEGIC PLAN**

Section I: Introduction & Overview .....	1
Section II: Mission and Vision of the 20th Judicial Circuit & Ottawa County Probate Courts .....	2
Section III: Strategic Issues, Goals, Objectives & Court/Divisional Projects...	3
Section IV: Court-Specific and Divisional Projects .....	9
Section V: Conclusion .....	12
Section VI: Glossary .....	13

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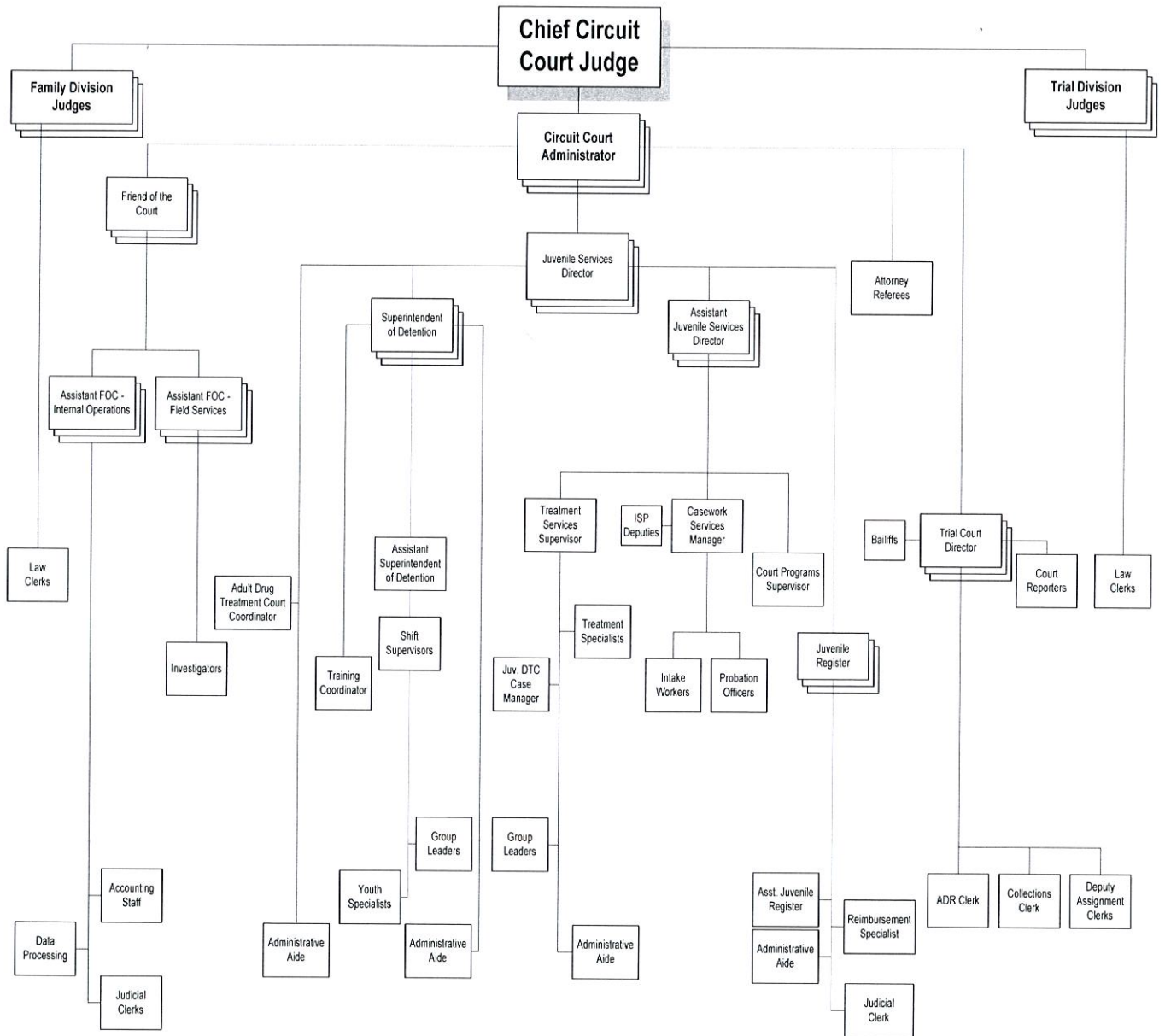
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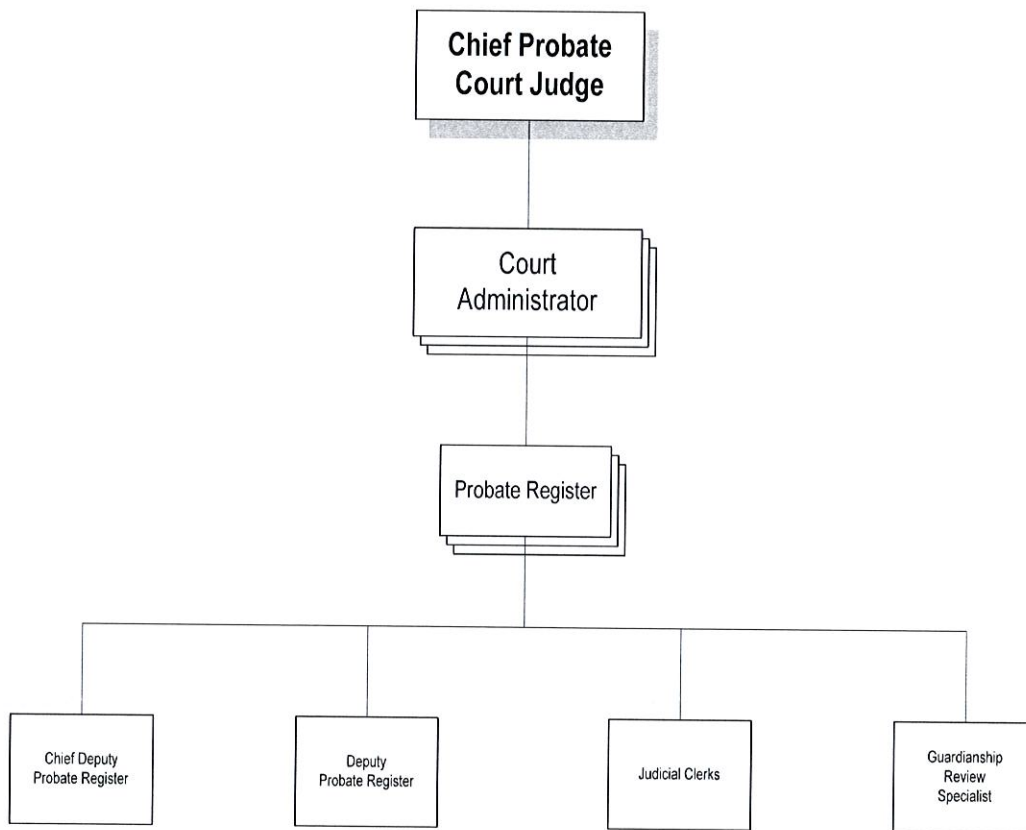
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# 20th Judicial Circuit Court Ottawa County



## Ottawa County Probate Court





# 20<sup>th</sup> JUDICIAL CIRCUIT & OTTAWA COUNTY PROBATE COURTS

## 2008-2010 Strategic Plan

Revised 12/08

### SECTION I: INTRODUCTION & OVERVIEW

The fundamental purpose of a court is to peacefully and fairly resolve society's inevitable conflicts, one case at a time. To engender public trust and confidence in the judicial process, a court must not only resolve conflicts, but also be perceived as resolving conflicts. To be effective, a court must be independent, impartial and have adequate funding, resources and community support.

Michigan's Constitutional Convention envisioned an independent and impartial court system when Article VI of the State Constitution was drafted, vesting the judicial power of the state exclusively in "one court of justice." The 20<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit and Ottawa County Probate Courts are part of this "one court of justice" and are overseen by the Michigan Supreme Court. As the Michigan Supreme Court is responsible for the oversight of trial courts on a statewide basis, the Chief Judges are responsible for the administration.

In 2004, the 20<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit and Probate Courts embarked on a comprehensive, strategic planning process that yielded a three year Strategic Plan to ensure effective administration. The purpose of the Strategic Plan, which was developed by an internal task force appointed by the Chief Judges, is to provide the Courts with a clear, future direction that will result in improved services to the public. Also, it is a mechanism by which the Courts can communicate information to stakeholders.

Newly collected information has been instrumental in updating the Courts' original, Long Range Strategic Plan. This *revised* Strategic Plan reflects systematically-obtained feedback from community partners, citizens, law enforcement, schools, inter-county departments, employees and administration. An annual review structure allowed for needed adjustments and flexibility in the implementation while utilizing the original Plan as the foundation. For specific details regarding the strategic planning process relating to organizational assessment and other information, please see the 2005 – 2007 Long Range Strategic Plan on the County's website, [www.miottawa.org](http://www.miottawa.org). Continued, consistent, critical evaluation will allow the Courts to measure success and refine operations on an ongoing basis as the Courts proceed in the deliberate building of a Court that inspires public trust.



## SECTION II: MISSION AND VISION OF THE 20<sup>TH</sup> JUDICIAL CIRCUIT & OTTAWA COUNTY PROBATE COURTS

A **mission statement** expresses the fundamental purpose of an organization. As the Task Force prepared these statements, great care was taken to incorporate comments from judges, court employees and stakeholders who have a vested interest in just, fair and efficient court operations.

A **vision statement** defines a preferred future of an organization. It describes what the organization desires to become or do in the future: what it should be at its best.

Below are the courts' mission and vision statements.

### **Mission of the 20<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit & Ottawa County Probate Courts**

To administer justice, provide restorative services and apply the law with equality, integrity and timeliness through trained, courteous staff in a manner that inspires public trust.

### **Vision of the 20<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit & Ottawa County Probate Courts**

Through strong leadership and skilled staff, the Court will consistently provide exemplary service by:

- Assuring accessibility to innovative, restorative, continually improving and efficient, professional service.
- Using state-of-the-art technology to maximize efficiency and effectiveness.
- Providing comprehensive, public education about court functions.
- Developing and nurturing strong, positive, collaborative partnerships.



### **SECTION III: STRATEGIC ISSUES, GOALS & OBJECTIVES**

The Courts identified five strategic areas. The strategic issue areas, goals and objectives are as follows:

**20<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit & Ottawa County Probate Courts  
Strategic Issue Areas**

1. Resources
2. Access to Courts
3. Efficient/Effective Services and Operations
4. Positive External Relations
5. Employee Opportunities and Satisfaction



## **Strategic Issue #1: Resources**

This strategic issue includes the need to secure adequate resources for the courts in areas such as staffing, technology/information systems, facilities, programming and collections of fines, revenues, fees, restitution, court costs, etc. In addition, it is helpful to apply for grants, as appropriate, in an effort to provide the Courts' innovative opportunities, while reducing the County's financial burden. Also, improved collections increase accountability while offsetting operational cost of the Courts.

Goal 1: Ensure sufficient resources to provide exemplary services.

Objective 1.1: Support the appropriate utilization of non-employee workers

Objective 1.2: Encourage the pursuit of additional forms of funding to compliment the budget and address organizational needs

Goal 2: Collect reimbursement, revenues, fines, fees, restitution and Court costs.

Objective 2.1: Enhance collection efforts (of reimbursement, revenues, fines, fees, restitution and court costs).

Objective 2.2: Continually track, report and evaluate collection efforts

### **Strategic Issue #1: Resources**

#### **Priority Projects**

1. Enhance the Court-wide Internship Program and use of Court volunteers
2. Complete the 20<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court and Ottawa County Probate Court Brochure
3. Develop resources to meet needs approved by the Leadership Team
4. Review Court collection procedures and recommend improvements

## **Strategic Issue #2: Access to Courts**

The Courts are committed to providing the general public greater access to services. Some areas of focus may include expanded use of technology, educational or informational materials and services for Limited English Proficiency (LEP) speaking users.

Goal 1: Provide accessible facilities to all.

Objective 1.1: Support the County and/or local communities in the development of public transportation by sharing information from Court User Survey.

Goal 2: Provide convenient, user-friendly and accessible Court services and information to all.

Objective 2.1: Use multiple, innovative technologies to provide and enhance access and information to the Courts' services, including enhancements to [www.miottawa.org](http://www.miottawa.org).

Objective 2.2: Improve public service and understanding of the courts through the development of a Courthouse Learning Center and enhanced staff training.

Objective 2.3: Improve customer service through enhanced services and information to self-represented clients through a Self-Help Center.

### **Strategic Issue #2: Access to Courts**

#### **Priority Projects**

1. Develop a Court Learning Center for new, Grand Haven Courthouse
2. Develop and implement services for self-represented persons



### **Strategic Issue #3: Efficient/Effective Services and Operations**

The Courts are committed to improving the efficiency and effectiveness of operations and services. Areas of focus may include streamlining internal processes, standardizing policies and procedures, increasing operational consistency, addressing general timeliness issues, enhancing compliance with victim's rights law, using effective case-management practices and expanding the use of technology.

Goal 1: Complete work in a timely manner.

Objective 1.1: Resolve all cases/legal matters in accordance with Michigan's adopted caseload management time standards.

Objective 1.2: Implement innovative and effective case processing policies and practices.

Objective 1.3: Streamline/improve internal work processes.

Goal 2: Provide exemplary service to Court users.

Objective 2.1: Support the recommendations in the Court User Survey, as appropriate.

### **Strategic Issue #3: Efficient/Effective Services and Operations**

#### **Priority Projects**

1. Conduct a Court User's Survey and report findings and recommendations to the Leadership Team
2. Develop and implement Caseload Management Guideline compliance protocols in conjunction with IT, BizStream, JIS, ImageSoft and other technology providers
3. Continue website review and improvement in conjunction with WebTecs, Inc.



## **Strategic Issue #4: Positive External Relations**

The Courts value partnering with community members such as prosecutors, defense attorneys, non-profit agencies, schools, clergy, law enforcement, local, state and federal governmental agencies, and the general public. The Courts seek to improve these working relationships on an ongoing basis. Some areas of focus may include improved communication, joint problem-solving, collaboration on treatment alternatives, fiscal collaboration, planning, etc. Nurturing existing and expanding toward new partnerships is integral to the Courts' long-term success.

Goal 1: Improve communication with justice system and community partners.

Objective 1.1: Support consistent and varied forms of communication with existing and new partners, e.g. press releases, Speaker's Bureau.

Objective 1.2: Encourage new partnership opportunities.

Goal 2: Increase public understanding of the Courts and access to services.

Objective 2.1: Inform the public of the Courts' services and access capabilities.

Objective 2.2: Offer joint training and educational opportunities, as appropriate

### **Strategic Issue #4: Positive External Relations**

#### **Priority Projects**

1. Plan and conduct informational events with the Ottawa County Bar Association and a petition-writing training with the Department of Human Services, as needed.
2. Develop and submit to the Leadership Team for dissemination appropriate materials to inform the public and partners about Court operations.
3. Conduct annual P.A.C.K. (Professionals Advocating and Caring for Kids) meeting with/for community stakeholders



## **Strategic Issue #5: Employee Opportunities and Satisfaction**

This strategic issue area addresses issues of court-wide communication, positive work environment, employee needs/interests and employee development for the Courts' future. Effective, court-wide communication improves productivity through reducing confusion and increasing consistent practices; maintaining a positive work environment is integral to high customer satisfaction and organizational performance; meeting the reasonable needs and interests of the staff impacts organizational performance; and developing employee skill levels ensures high quality Court services for the future.

**Goal 1:** Continually strive to improve the work environment.

Objective 1.1: Encourage open communication among Court divisions.

Objective 1.2: Promote respect and teamwork among employees

**Goal 2:** Maintain a highly - skilled staff.

Objective 2.1: Promote professional on-site and off-site education and training opportunities in identified areas of need

Objective 2.2: Ensure all employees' certifications are complete and in compliance with their respective positions

Objective 2.3: Implement effective on-the-job staff development programs.

### **Strategic Issue #5: Employee Opportunities and Satisfaction**

#### **Priority Projects**

1. Continue employee training opportunities through solicitation of SJI (State Justice Institute) training grants and use of the ICM (Institute for Court Management) Court Management Program
2. Solicit and submit a monthly, work-related article for the *Court Communicator* from an employee or judge.
3. Using the National Center for State Courts, CourTools, Measure #9, conduct a Court Employee Satisfaction Survey and submit results for Leadership Team review and Court Communicator publication.

## **SECTION IV: COURT-SPECIFIC AND DIVISIONAL PROJECTS**

Due to the importance to the mission of the 20<sup>th</sup> Circuit and the Ottawa County Probate Courts, each of the priority projects described above were assigned to one of five Strategic Issue Teams for implementation. In addition to the Strategic Issue Priority Projects, divisional projects respective to each division or court are listed below as they apply to a Strategic Issue in order to give them special recognition.

The following projects will be completed by staff within each office, as time and resources allow. The projects are categorized within the strategic issues areas; however, this is only meant to demonstrate the connection to the planning process. Progress reports will be submitted prior to each SPOT Team meeting to document achievements on individual projects.

### Probate Court

- Strategic Issue #1: Resources
- Strategic Issue #2: Access to Courts
- Strategic Issue #3: Efficient/Effective Services and Operations
  - Improve current document imaging – Imaging codes and mark up tool
  - Develop an online policy manual
- Strategic Issue #4: Positive External Relations
  - Provide training to CMH as needed
- Strategic Issue #5: Employee Opportunities and Satisfaction

### Friend of the Court

- Strategic Issue #1: Resources
  - (Include) emphasize collection of court costs and fines on contempt findings
- Strategic Issue #2: Access to Courts
  - Explore increased space at Holland satellite office & general FOC office email with workflow connected to On Base
  - Minimize the number of clients that miss scheduled appointments with their investigator



- Strategic Issue #3: Efficient/Effective Services and Operations
  - Encourage client participation in FOC informational conference held following paternity arraignments
  - Take proactive measures to reduce defaults in paternity arraignments and make timely employment assistance referrals for unemployed payers
- Strategic Issue #4: Positive External Relations
  - Continue participation in annual Bench/Bar meeting
- Strategic Issue #5: Employee Opportunities and Satisfaction
  - Compile and evaluate information relative to adjusted work hours
  - Work toward seamless transition into new county building in fall 2009

#### Juvenile Services

- Strategic Issue #1: Resources
  - Write and submit Ropes Course feasibility study to Insurance Authority
  - Place interns during academic year
- Strategic Issue #2: Access to Courts
  - Track and submit transportation needs to the County
- Strategic Issue #3: Efficient/Effective Services and Operations
  - Refine technology advancements
  - Complete and disseminate the Community Report Card
  - Implement a date certain process for all hearings
- Strategic Issue #4: Positive External Relations
  - Utilize the detention center contacts to enhance Circuit and Probate Courts visibility
  - Develop a victim rights program to increase restorative justice practices
- Strategic Issue #5: Employee Opportunities and Satisfaction
  - Provide opportunities for employee involvement

## Trial Division

- Strategic Issue #1: Resources
  - Develop computer support for collections
  - Develop CourtStream applications
- Strategic Issue #2: Access to Courts
  - Develop multilingual services
- Strategic Issue #3: Efficient/Effective Services and Operations
  - Establish periodic meetings with IT and Court Records to review caseflow reports
  - Continue to monitor case management guidelines and evaluate the impact of case preparation orders
  - Work with IT and County Clerk to improve imaging ID codes
  - Develop online policy and procedures manual
- Strategic Issue #4: Positive External Relations
  - Develop protocol with Mediation services for referral of domestic cases
- Strategic Issue #5: Employee Opportunities and Satisfaction
  - Reconfigure staff space and workflow in preparation for move to new courthouse
  - Encourage use of Michigan Judicial Institute web-based training



## **SECTION V: CONCLUSION**

The original 2005 – 2007 Long Range Strategic Plan was an ambitious undertaking. The staff diligently worked toward successful implementation of many of the goals and divisional, priority projects set forth. This intense initiative has assisted the Courts in being responsive to the public through high levels of service and performance.

Throughout the initial implementation of the Strategic Plan, the Courts' administration monitored progress – assisting and supporting whenever possible. The Strategic Planning Oversight Team (SPOT) met on a regular basis to review progress, discuss challenges, problem-solve and celebrate accomplishments. Co-team leaders of the five (5) Strategic Issue Implementation Teams orchestrated frequent meetings. Team members worked very hard to accomplish the goals, objectives and priority projects set forth for their strategic issue area.

In addition to the significant achievements, several lessons were learned. Perhaps one of the most important lessons learned was the knowledge that implementing a Strategic Plan is not a “sport for sprinters”. Rather, it is a deliberate, progressive and endurance campaign with great potential results. Consequently, as the Strategic Plan has been updated for 2008 - 2010, it has been critical the Courts remain realistic and imperative, tasks of goal design and achievement be balanced with human resource capability. Thus, goals, objectives and divisional priority projects were reduced in numbers and/or in scope during the updating process. As the Courts implement the revised Strategic Plan, maintaining a realistic approach will allow the Courts to keep focused on ultimate outcomes and benefits to all, over the duration of time.

## **SECTION VI: GLOSSARY**

Mission Statement: Expresses the fundamental purpose of an organization.

Vision Statement: Defines a preferred future of an organization. It describes what the organization desires to become or do in the future: what it should be at its best.

Strategic Issues: Internal or external, underlying issues that are fundamentally important to the organization over the long-term.

Goal: A statement that reflects an anticipated outcome or result.

Objective: General statements that describe the manner in which the end result – or goal – will be achieved.

Priority Projects: These are the shorter-term (1-2 years) strategic and operational priorities of the organization.

SPOT Team: The Strategic Planning Oversight Team consists of members who want to be actively involved in the implementation process and oversee the Courts' Strategic Plan. They are charged with regular reviews of implementation, problem-solving challenges, maintaining focus, supporting the Implementation Teams, building support, sharing information and celebrating/acknowledging goal completion or success.

Strategic Planning Coordinator: The appointed Strategic Planning Coordinator is the Circuit Court Administrator or his/her designee. This person is responsible for helping to implement and monitor progress of the Strategic Plan; functions as primary liaison between Strategic Issue Implementation Teams and working members of those teams, the Circuit/Probate Leadership Team and individuals working on other projects; and is the primary contact for judges and staff.

Strategic Issue Implementation Teams: Each Implementation Team represents one of the five Strategic Issue areas. Implementation Teams lead the facilitation of change and improvement efforts identified in their respective strategic issue areas. The Teams are comprised of managers and staff from the Courts and are responsible for completing priority projects, communicating progress and encouraging others to get involved.

Leadership Team: The Circuit and Probate Courts' Leadership Team is comprised of Directors representing each division of the Courts.



## NOTES

