

20TH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT AND
OTTAWA COUNTY PROBATE COURTS



2021-2024
STRATEGIC PLAN

APRIL 28, 2021





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TWENTIETH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT COURT
OTTAWA COUNTY

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CIRCUIT COURT ADMINISTRATOR

April 28, 2021

Dear Colleagues,

Developing this Strategic Plan for the 20th Circuit and Ottawa County Probate Courts during the COVID-19 pandemic was a challenging and eye-opening experience. Unexpected court closures, suspension of jury trials, technological obstacles and concerns about the physical and mental health of our families, our clients, and co-workers have forced all of us in the justice delivery business to think carefully about how to preserve access to justice within our community. As noted in a recent speech by Michigan Supreme Court Chief Justice Bridget Mary McCormack, "Equal justice is at the heart of the American promise to each of our citizens."

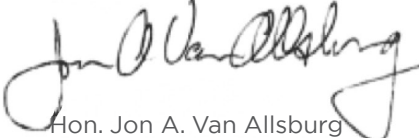
With this in mind, our talented Strategic Planning Team, guided by Dr. Brenda Wagenknecht-Ivey, CEO of PRAXIS Consulting, spent several months conducting a detailed trends analysis. This included surveying court employees and a variety of community partners and justice system stakeholders, reviewing research on evidence based practices and promising practices, and determining the strengths and weakness of our local judicial branch, to focus on a clear path toward high performance and continuous improvement.

The Team next identified four strategic focus areas (SFA) which will guide our efforts to provide improved access to justice and outstanding customer service. These four areas include: SFA 1 - Improve the Court User Experience (Access, Services, and Programs); SFA 2 - Improve the Employee Experience (Diversity, Inclusion, Satisfaction, and Well-Being); SFA 3 - Enhance Efficient Court Operations and Timely and Fair Resolution; and SFA 4 - Enhance Funding, Resources, and Facilities.

In the final stages of the strategic planning process, the Courts' Planning Team moved from the realm of strategic thinking to strategic execution. The Team has developed meaningful and measurable projects for judges and court staff to implement as we continue striving to meet the Courts' Mission - "to administer justice and restore wholeness in a manner that inspires public trust."

We appreciate your interest in supporting the Courts' efforts to pursue these important strategic initiatives. We look forward to working together as we strive to achieve justice for all.

Sincerely,


Hon. Jon A. Van Allsburg
Chief Judge, 20th Circuit Court


Hon. Mark A. Feyen
Chief Judge, Ottawa County Probate Court

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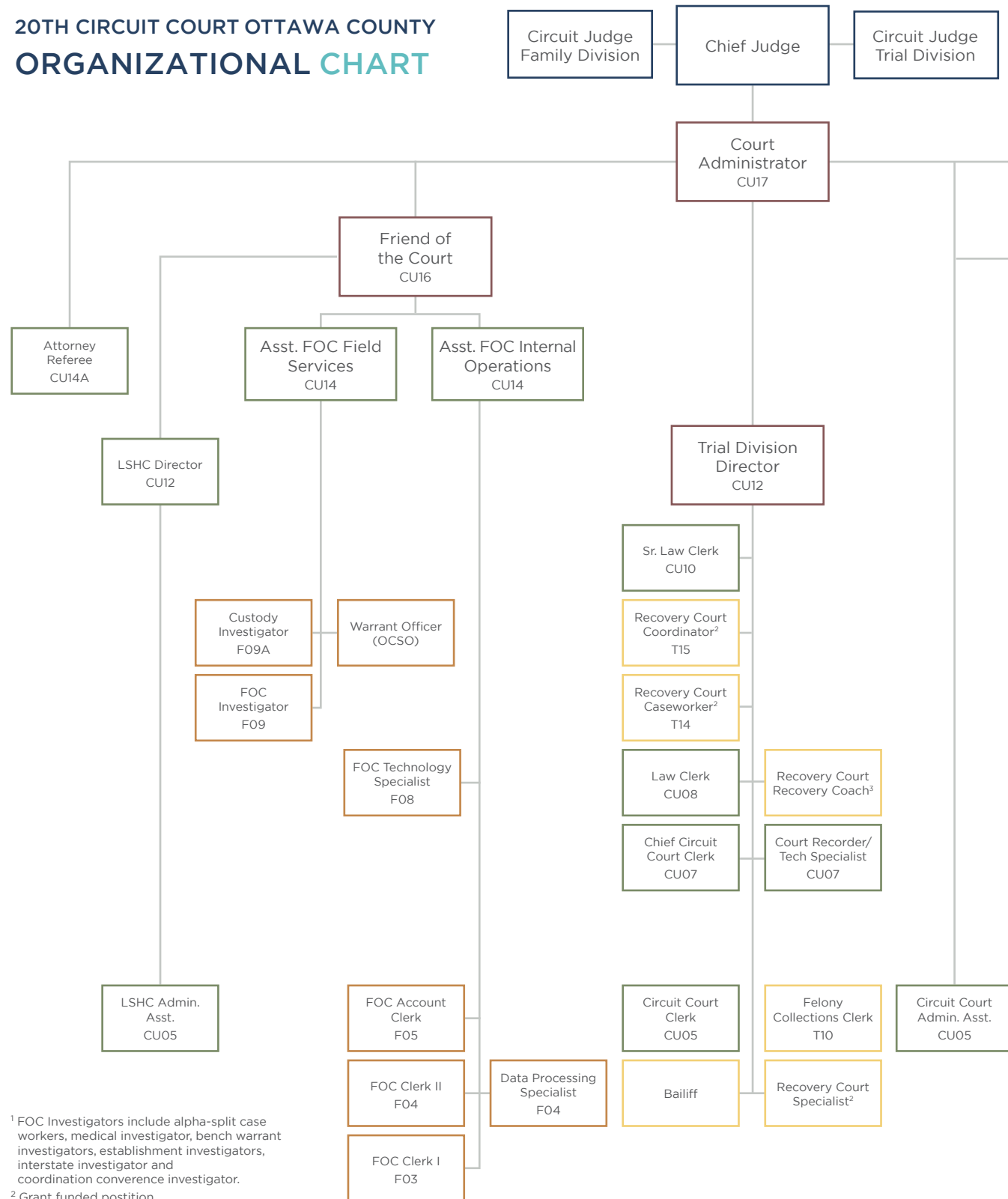
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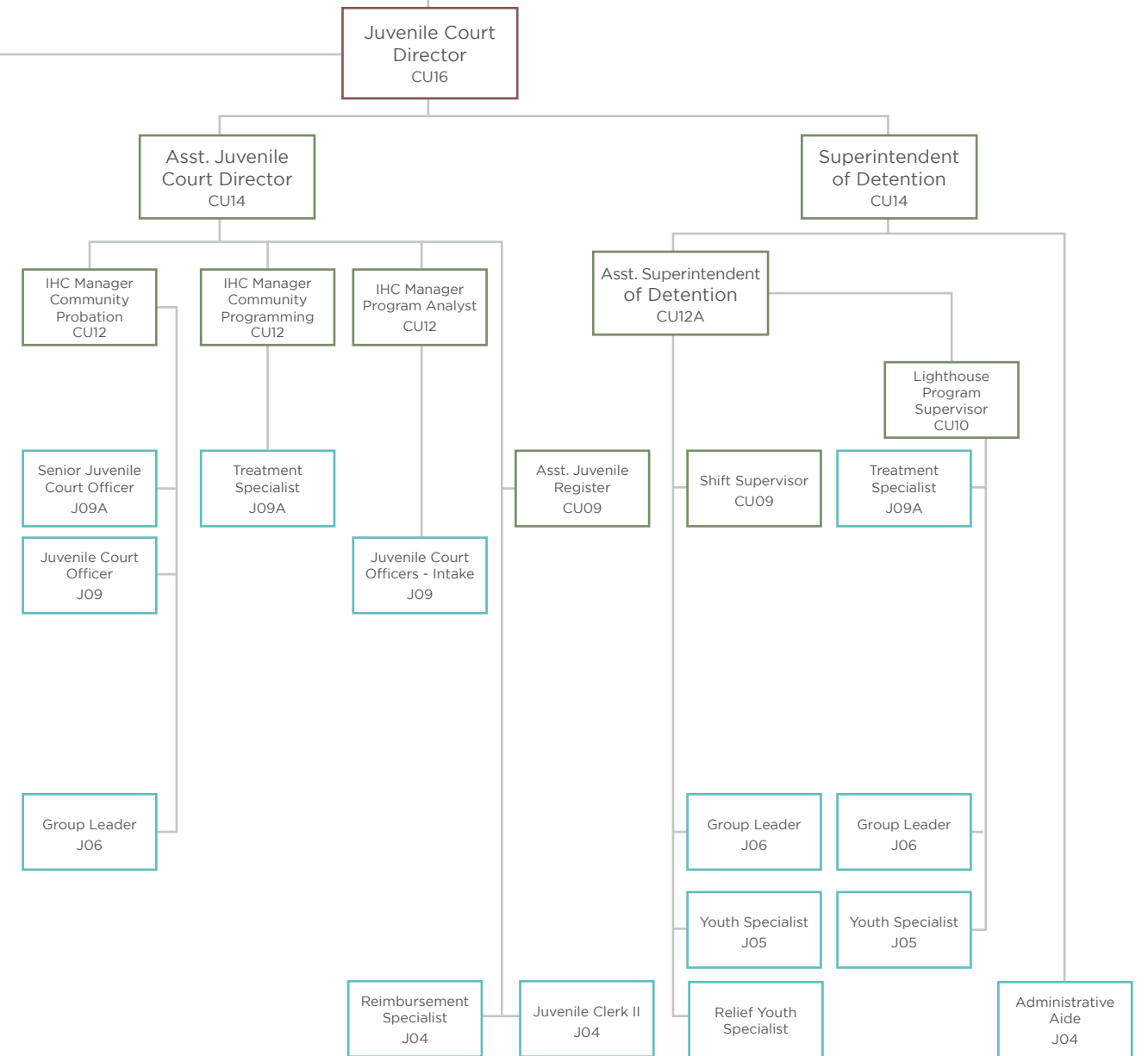
20TH CIRCUIT COURT OTTAWA COUNTY ORGANIZATIONAL CHART



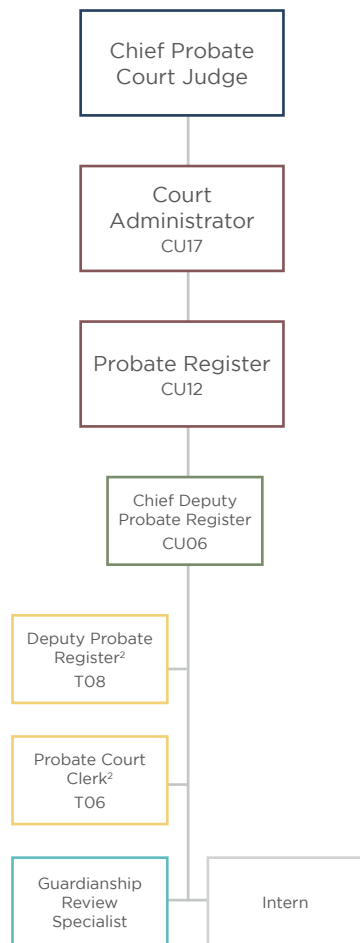
¹ FOC Investigators include alpha-split case workers, medical investigator, bench warrant investigators, establishment investigators, interstate investigator and coordination conference investigator.
² Grant funded position.
³ Services provided under contract.

LEGEND

- Judge
- Leadership Team
- Unclassified
- Group T
- FOC
- Juvenile



OTTAWA COUNTY PROBATE COURT ORGANIZATIONAL CHART



LEGEND

- Judge
- Leadership Team
- Unclassified
- Group T
- Contractual



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OVERVIEW

Ottawa County is located on Lake Michigan's spectacular freshwater coastline where nature is cherished and protected. More than the lakeshore, you'll find the people of Ottawa County friendly yet driven, working hard to succeed in charming downtown small businesses, at manufacturing hubs with global impact and on acres passed down from generations. We embrace creativity and believe that diversity makes us stronger. We resolve that our public services must be high-quality and cost-effective. We are innovative and never wait for someone to solve our problems for us. We are friendly neighbors chipping in, lending a hand and making sure you know Ottawa County is where you belong.

This Strategic Plan provides value to many audiences. For the Courts there is clear direction on priorities that help achieve our Mission - "to administer justice and restore wholeness in a manner that inspires public trust." For the Michigan Supreme Court and the State Court Administrative Office there is recognition of high-performing courts which are compliant with the law, court rules, administrative orders, performance measures and more. For the Ottawa County Board of Commissioners (the Courts' funding unit) there is assurance the taxpayer's contributions to support local government, including the third branch of government, are responsibly used to meet the needs of the public. For many Court stakeholders and community partners there is a strong sense of

programmatic mission, as the Courts effectively use evidenced based programs and promising practices to meet client needs. Most importantly, there is a commitment to the public that the judicial branch is a stabilizing force in the community where judges and court employees daily provide access to justice, excellent customer service, and encourage public trust and confidence in the court system.

Strategic Planning is an important opportunity for court leaders to come together and focus on the purpose of the judicial branch of government. We scan the environment, assess our positions, incorporate input, determine goals and establish priorities for performing essential public service in alignment with current law and direction from

the Michigan Supreme Court. We are often reminded strategic planning is a process, not an event. The resulting Strategic Plan becomes a road map for the proper administration of justice in Ottawa County, often reminding us of the importance of our work to the quality of life in our community. Understanding our collective strengths and weaknesses, as well as the many opportunities and threats with which we are faced every day, also provides important guidance to the judges, court administration, and employees who strive to ensure a high performing court system.

During this unusual "year of the pandemic" strategic planning discussions also allowed for some focus on our organizational culture, which directly impacts the ability of the Courts to function appropriately.



Court culture may be the single greatest factor governing a court organization's ability to conduct a strategic planning process and subsequently implement a strategic plan.²



“An important management truth is that there is more than one way to get things done and done well in the workplace. There is rarely a single best way for either a private company or a public institution to organize itself to achieve high-quality outcomes for its customers. Formulating the most effective strategy for a particular workplace requires not only a good understanding of the formal structure and lines of authority, but [also] the unwritten rules, unofficial networks and underlying norms and behaviors that shape how work gets done.”³

These important admonitions are part of the National Association for Court Management (NACM) Core Competency strategic planning curriculum and accurately describe the experience of the 20th Circuit and Ottawa County Probate Courts throughout many years of strategic thinking, planning, and execution. Since 2004, Chief Judges, court administration and staff have actively pursued the strategic planning process and effectively implemented several iterations of a robust strategic plan. As a result of these efforts, the Courts have become recognized leaders within the judicial branch with a reputation for collaboration, innovation, creative program development, improved access to justice and much more. In addition, the Courts have achieved numerous accomplishments and milestones.

As the Courts' Strategic Planning Team developed the current iteration of strategic focus areas, goals, and strategies described in this report, there was significant discussion about the culture of the Courts and Ottawa County as well as the vision of the Courts to “exemplify and deliver the highest standards of justice and service.” Promoting access to justice, enhancing employee professionalism and job satisfaction, advancing judicial branch excellence and innovation, and assuring adequate resources are the cornerstones of this strategic plan and will serve the Ottawa County community well for many years.

¹ Ottawa County Strategic Business Plan, https://www.miottawa.org/Departments/BOC/pdf/2018-2019_OC_Strategic-Business_Plan.pdf

² NACM Core – Strategic Planning, [file:///C:/Users/kevin/Downloads/Revised-Strat-Planning-Curr-Dsgn_2018-09-26_2d-Ed%20\(4\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/kevin/Downloads/Revised-Strat-Planning-Curr-Dsgn_2018-09-26_2d-Ed%20(4).pdf)

³ Brian J. Ostrom and Roger A. Hanson, “Understanding and Diagnosing Court Culture,” 45 Court Review 104 (2009); <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1307&context=ajacourtreview> and, alternatively, http://www.ncsc.org/-/media/Files/PDF/Services%20and%20Experts/CTF/Understanding_Court_Culture.ashx (p. 1).

⁴ See Appendix A, Strategic Plan Accomplishments 2004-2020.



SECTION 2

MISSION, VISION & CORE VALUES

The mission, vision, and core values statements are the guiding forces behind the 20th Circuit and the Ottawa County Probate Courts as an organization. The mission statement communicates the purpose of the Courts. The vision statement provides insight into what the Courts hope to achieve in the future. The core values reflect the Courts' guiding principles and ethics.

MISSION, VISION & CORE VALUES

These statements play an important role in strategy development in three distinct ways:

- 1 by providing means to create and weigh various strategic plans and alternatives;
- 2 by laying down the fundamentals of the Courts' identity and defining their purpose; and
- 3 by providing an understanding of their operational directions.

By identifying and understanding how values, mission, and vision interact with one another, the Courts have created a well-designed and successful strategic plan which leads to high performance and improved access to justice for all community members.



SECTION 3

TRENDS ANALYSIS FUTURE SCENARIOS

The Strategic Planning Team reviewed external and internal trends to understand the current environment and to anticipate the long-term implications for the Courts. Following are two plausible future scenarios that emerged from the analysis and discussions.

TRENDS ANALYSIS – FUTURE SCENARIOS

SCENARIO 1 THE FUTURE IS CHALLENGING - LOTS OF UNCERTAINTY AHEAD

Ottawa County’s population continues to grow. Ottawa County remains a desirable place to live, albeit more expensive than some neighboring counties.

The pandemic continues. Public health and safety remain a high concern. Safety precautions and requirements remain in place (e.g., screenings, physical distancing, wearing masks, limitations on face to face gatherings, etc.)



Many businesses continue to struggle. Unemployment worsens. The economy appears to be heading toward a recession or even possibly a depression.

Substance abuse and mental health issues in the community continue to rise.

Civil and racial unrest continue. Race relations are strained. Diversity, equity, and inclusion are high priorities for organizations.



Budget projections are uncertain. Cost containment and savings are high priorities.

“Disruption” fatigue and trauma are prevalent – COVID, race relations, Zoom, etc.

Court operations remain disrupted.

Zoom hearings are continuing, however, connectivity issues and other challenges persist (e.g., they take longer, some court users are not proficient in use of technology, etc.). Zoom hearings are more casual than hearings held in the courthouse/courtroom.



SCENARIO 2 THINGS ARE IMPROVING – THE COURTS ARE ADAPTING, IMPROVING, & TRANSFORMING

Ottawa County’s population continues to grow. Ottawa County remains a desirable place to live and raise a family.

The pandemic has persisted, however, the severity and numbers have improved. Public health and safety precautions have become common practice. The safety procedures in place are working well. Judges, staff, court litigants, partners, and the public have adapted.

Businesses in Ottawa County are recovering. Unemployment numbers are going down.

Civil and racial unrest continue. The County is working on improving race relations. A dialogue and strategies for improving diversity, equity, and inclusion are underway in Ottawa County.

Long-term budget projections remain uncertain, however, the budget is stable. Ottawa County is expected to fare better than most counties in Michigan over the long-term.

Case backlogs are growing. More cases are going to court vs. settling. Zoom proceedings are slower than in-person proceedings, consequently scheduling capacity is limited.

Court services also are continuing via Zoom (e.g., self-help, probation, mediation, parenting time), however, some services are less effective virtually than when provided in-person.

Collections may be adversely impacted due to the struggling economy, high unemployment, and possible change in case management system.



Staff are feeling stressed and anxious; they are experiencing high levels of disruption/COVID fatigue. Some have become ill and others are quarantined due to positive test results or exposure to COVID-19. Employee well-being is a high concern. Self-care is important and necessary.

Many staff are continuing to work from home. Alternative hours and rotations have been established for staff who must work from the courthouse/court locations. Some staff miss seeing and working in-person with their colleagues.



“Fatigue” generally continues. Everyone has been through a lot over the past few years. Mental health and substance abuse programs/services are available through community resources and the County’s Employee Assistance Program (EAP). Staff are taking advantage of services and programs offered by the County and through the EAP.

Court operations are running smoothly. The Courts have adapted procedures and practices as needed to the current environment.

The Courts have returned to a combination of in-person and remote hearings and services. The remote hearings and services have enhanced access, convenience, and flexibility for some litigants, families, and partners. Transportation is not as much of an issue as it once was because of the availability of remote hearings/services.



Internet connectivity throughout the County is improving. The Courts are not experiencing as many Internet/connectivity issues/problems as they once did.

Court rules, statutes, and procedures are being modified to catch up with and allow for new practices. There are fewer issues with testimony and getting documents to the courts.

Technology upgrades (e.g., hardware and software) and ongoing IT support are needed.

The Courts have instituted a hybrid work arrangement for employees that seems to be working well. Staff who are working from home are continuing to be productive and teamwork is high. Staff also are remaining connected to their colleagues through in-person and remote interactions. The public is receiving excellent service and court performance and productivity are high.

Employee well-being remains a high priority. Overall well-being including morale, satisfaction, engagement, and diversity and inclusion are improving.

Staffing adjustments may be needed to balance workloads as caseloads and public service needs are changing (e.g., probate, FOC, juvenile, LSHC).

Additional training is needed to ensure judges, staff, partners, and litigants have the skills needed to use technology and adapt to changing procedures.



Other ways to enhance access and services also are being explored (e.g., satellite services, provide virtual services during non-traditional hours). This includes improving access for those most vulnerable (e.g., low income, language barriers, disabled, etc.).



SECTION 4

ORGANIZATIONAL ASSESSMENT

The following is a summary of the Courts’ strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (**SWOT**), according to the Strategic Planning Team. Strengths and areas for improvement identified by external partners through the 2020 Strategic Planning survey also are included in the summary.



STRENGTHS

- 1 E-filing for most case types
- 2 Technology in general has improved
- 3 Resilience and motivation to continue to do the job
- 4 Access to computers at home
- 5 Funding in general
- 6 Organization having trust in employees to do the work from home; financial resourcefulness as a county
- 7 Able to provide good customer service during a pandemic
- 8 Good resources through IT department even with IT pushing self-reliance
- 9 Safety protocols and precautionary measures and plans if there is a COVID exposure
- 10 Timeliness of hearings and guidelines
- 11 Collections remain strong at FOC
- 12 Online dispute resolution
- 13 Outreach planning in place for when things change
- 14 Responsive, creative, and expeditious problem solving – within the courts and county-wide
- 15 Improved communication across county departments
- 16 Dedicated staff and judicial officers
- 17 Problem solving/recovery courts

WEAKNESSES

- 1 Technology/IT Systems/outdated equipment - behind the times, need additional tools; difficult to keep up
- 2 Spotty cell service throughout the County; many not able to access service in West Olive
- 3 Lack of IT support to maintain efficient operations and support for remote hearings; remote hearings take longer/not as productive
- 4 Virtual interpretation is not effective; difficult to find interpreters in other languages (other than Spanish)
- 5 Lack of strong online presence - accessibility of information; website difficult to navigate
- 6 Lack of plain language for court processes and users
- 7 Ability of court users to access court staff
- 8 Paper files
- 9 E-filing is confusing; clients need clerk support
10. Access to client friendly documentation for those without technical resources (e.g., fillable forms)
- 11 Lack diversity in the workforce
12. Not enough staff to handle the workload
- 13 Lack/need to improve cross-training among staff
- 14 Staff adaptability due to constant change
- 15 Staff support, training, resources needed to help handle clients with mental illness
- 16 Training for staff who assume new roles when retirements occur

WEAKNESSES CONT.

- 17 Staff need to be prepared/well trained to assume new roles when retirements occur
- 18 Need to improve budget options and opportunities for professional development
- 19 Fillmore court complex - facility is not conducive to effective operations for staff and clients
- 20 Remote work decreases collaboration and employee morale due to disconnect with staff and co-workers
- 21 Productivity issue with technology from home - technology is not always as good from remote locations; range of skill levels for technology at work from home

OPPORTUNITIES

- 1 Expand/improve technology - expand e-filing to other case types; use technology to enhance access, use e-signatures, e-scheduling, text notifications; expand use of OnBase Functions/ search capabilities; etc.
- 2 New case management system with public option viewing
- 3 Improve access: set up satellite options; public portal for public access and pro pers; access to ROA; expand court hours to meet needs
- 4 Improve/make self-help services/assistance a priority – provide information from all depts; implement court navigator concept
- 5 Commit to/add DEI strategies to Strategic Plan; examine/improve policies and processes
- 6 Raise the Age and Clean Slate legislation
- 7 Adopt/formalize flexible staff hours/remote working options
- 8 New Family Justice Center - programs
- 9 Possibility of 5th circuit judgeship - improve scheduling availability, additional specialization of dockets
- 10 Improve County benefits - County offered child care; add massage therapy to health care benefits; explore paid parental leave and improve balance with operational needs (additional staff)

THREATS

- 1 Technology limitations
- 2 Lack of IT support
- 3 Inability of clients and or judges/staff to use new technology (need training/education)
- 4 Economic downturn; impact on future funding
- 5 Ongoing fatigue of staff
- 6 Delay in building the Family Justice Center, state revenue impact, creation of new judgeship delayed
- 7 Adverse effects of work from home (AWL – Alternative Work Location) – lower productivity, limited interaction w/coworkers, isolation felt by some, shifting of employer expenses to employees in home offices
- 8 Threats to DEI initiatives





SECTION 5

STRATEGIC FOCUS AREAS

LONG-RANGE GOALS, & SHORT AND LONG TERM STRATEGIES

The Strategic Planning Team identified four strategic focus areas that are vitally important to the Courts in the future. The following four strategic focus areas are deemed critically important even in times of great uncertainty and regardless of how the future unfolds. Making improvements in these four areas will ensure the Courts are fulfilling their mission and core values, working toward the vision of the future, prepared for and responsive to external and internal trends, and responsive to the feedback and suggestions from external partners and employees.

STRATEGIC FOCUS AREAS

LONG-RANGE GOALS, & SHORT AND LONG-TERM STRATEGIES



THE 4 STRATEGIC FOCUS AREAS

Improve the Court User Experience (Access, Services, and Programs)

Improve the Court Employee Experience (Diversity, Inclusion, Satisfaction, and Well-Being)

Enhance Efficient and Timely Court Operations and Fair Resolution

Enhance Funding, Resources, and Facilities

Clearly embedded within each of these Strategic Focus Areas is the Courts' commitment to improving the culture of diversity, equity, and inclusion among all court personnel and to share this commitment with the community we serve. Issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion are an integral part of the planning, development, and delivery of the Courts' education, training, and professional development opportunities offered. Collectively we want to achieve a workforce that is culturally competent, possesses a demonstrated capacity to engage, and meets the needs of diverse users.

In addition, policies, practices, and data support the Courts' commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Organizationally, we are committed to an

evidence-based approach to analyzing and defining issues by supporting accountability and fostering a culture that is diverse, equitable and inclusive. The Courts promote the acquisition of culturally competent skills where employees possess demonstrated abilities in providing culturally competent service experiences and outcomes to all users of court services with a common and unified commitment to the fair and impartial administration of justice.

Borrowing from recent work of the Michigan Supreme Court Justice for All Task Force, the Courts strive for a justice system that is "welcoming, understandable, collaborative, adaptive and trusted".

⁵ <https://courts.michigan.gov/News-Events/JusticeForAll/Final%20JFA%20Report%20121420.pdf>



Strategic Focus Area 1:

IMPROVE THE COURT USER EXPERIENCE

(ACCESS, SERVICES, AND PROGRAMS)

Improving the court user experience is a high priority for the Courts. This includes ensuring access to all people, as well as strengthening and expanding services and programs. The Courts are committed to making improvements that will enhance and expand remote and physical access, in-person and remote assistance, and services and programs. These improvements will be targeted to meet the needs of all court users, including minorities, underrepresented, and disenfranchised individuals.

External partners, per responses to the 2020 Strategic Planning Survey, provided the following feedback and recommendations related to access, services, and programs. It is clear from the examples provided that minorities, underrepresented, and disenfranchised individuals are disproportionately impacted by many existing barriers to the justice system. With this in mind, a variety of goals and strategies presented in this Plan will address methods of improving access to justice.

CHALLENGES/ISSUES

The biggest challenges/emerging issues for the Courts in the next 3-5 years were identified as:

- Need for and access to treatment services (e.g., substance abuse treatment and mental health treatment);
- Remote and physical access to the courts; and
- Costs of the legal system.

ACCESS BARRIERS

The most significant barriers to accessing and using the Courts were identified as:

- Difficulty understanding what one needs to do to complete court business;
- Costs of going to/using the courts;
- Difficulty doing court business remotely; and
- Difficulties getting to court, including the distance required to travel.

CHANGES/IMPROVEMENTS

The most wanted changes/improvements in the next 3-5 years were identified as:

- Expanded problem-solving/specialty courts;
- Enhanced access to courts/reduce access barriers;
- Expanded services/programs for youth and families; and
- Improved use of existing/emerging technologies.

COURT EMPLOYEES, THROUGH A POLL AT THE ALL-STAFF MEETING IN NOVEMBER 2020, made the following suggestions for improving the court user experience:

- 1 Continue Zoom meetings with court users.
- 2 Extend court hours (e.g., beyond 8 a.m. – 5 p.m.).
- 3 Provide more assistance and resources to self-represented litigants.
- 4 Provide access to kiosks in community and court locations.
- 5 Provide language assistance at all court locations.
- 6 Make the website mobile friendly or develop an app that is more effective on mobile devices.
- 7 Continue to use/invest in technological innovations – e.g., online “chat” with employees/chat bots. Expand ability to do court business online/virtually.

LONG RANGE GOALS AND STRATEGIES

Goal 1: The Courts will be accessible and understandable to all.

STRATEGIES:

- 1 Expand ability to do business with the courts remotely.
- 2 Enhance personal assistance to court users when onsite or conducting court business remotely.
- 3 Pursue and use new and emerging technologies to enhance access.
- 4 Listen and be responsive to feedback gathered from court users and partners about needs and experiences.
- 5 Enhance language assistance to court users with limited English proficiency.
- 6 Align access improvements with statewide initiatives like the Justice for All Commission, Trial Court Funding Commission, and the Michigan Joint Task Force on Jail and Pretrial Incarceration.

⁶ <https://www.miottawa.org/Courts/20thcircuit/default.htm>

Goal 2: The Courts’ programs and services will be transparent, fair, and will meet the needs of diverse court users.

STRATEGIES:

- 1 Strengthen and expand the use of evidence-based and promising programs and services.
- 2 Evaluate and improve court programs and services ensuring they are fair to all.
- 3 Educate court users/public about court procedures and processes.
- 4 Collaborate with justice system and community partners to improve and expand community programs and services which are relevant to court users (e.g., treatment services, employment services, housing programs, legal assistance).
- 5 Assist court personnel to better understand the experience of others related to race, diversity, equity, and inclusion.

See the Courts’ 2021-2022 Operational Plan for a list of the Courts’ annual strategic projects.



**Strategic Focus Area 2:
IMPROVE THE EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE
(DIVERSITY, INCLUSION, SATISFACTION, AND WELL-BEING)**

Improving the employee experience is a high priority for the Courts. There are many benefits to improving diversity, inclusion, satisfaction, and well-being of all court employees. This strategic focus area includes:

- Becoming an employer of choice in western Michigan.
- Embracing diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- Developing a Court culture that is more inclusive, welcoming, and equitable for all staff.
- Strengthening employee satisfaction and engagement through professional development, career advancement, competitive wages and benefits, and employee appreciation.
- Enhancing the overall well-being of employees (e.g., physical, economical, emotional/psychological, social, etc.).

Employees, at the All-Staff Meeting in November 2020, provided the following suggestions for improving the court employee experience.

- 1 Focus on employee well-being/wellness (e.g., find ways to reduce isolation from co-workers – use creative team building/connection opportunities with co-workers; be more compassionate and understanding – staff are stressed and doing their best; provide support for essential staff).
- 2 Provide staff with interactive methods to communicate/connect (e.g., team collaboration tools).
- 3 Hold monthly circuit court staff meetings.
- 4 Provide more training/interdepartmental training; continue to support professional development of employees.
- 5 Provide more promotional opportunities.
- 6 Complete the new Family Justice Center.
- 7 Implement changes in a measured way; test before implementing full-scale.
- 8 Implement a mix of onsite and remote work (hybrid model) post pandemic: continue remote work; implement flexible and alternative/non-traditional work hours; allow more work from home options.
- 9 Invest in technology; continue making hardware, software, and application improvements.
- 10 Provide better IT help desk assistance.
- 11 Improve wages and benefits.
- 12 Continue to improve safety measures.

LONG RANGE GOALS AND STRATEGIES

Goal 1: The Courts will recruit, develop, and support a high quality, diverse workforce.

STRATEGIES:

- 1 Increase diversity of leadership, management, and the general workforce, ensuring the composition reflects the community.
- 2 Recruit and retain a diverse workforce, using best practices related to DEI hiring standards.
- 3 Expand professional development, career advancement, and mentoring opportunities for all staff, ensuring an equitable impact across all groups.

Goal 2: The Courts' work environment and practices are inclusive and welcoming to all.

STRATEGIES:

- 1 Solicit diverse employee perspectives when making court and workplace improvements.
- 1 Expand job sharing/shadowing opportunities for staff.
- 1 Create/promote a culture that welcomes, values, and celebrates diversity, equity, and inclusion - where everyone feels they belong.
- 1 Use effective methods for fostering connections and enhancing relationships within and across Court divisions.

Goal 3: The Courts' workforce is satisfied and engaged.

STRATEGIES:

- 1 Implement practices that improve employee wellbeing, satisfaction, and engagement (while also maintaining the highest standards of service to court users).
- 2 Invest in and provide professional development opportunities to all employees.
- 3 Remove barriers that preclude some employees from accessing professional development/ training opportunities.
- 4 Gather and be responsive to feedback from employees about their needs and experiences.
- 5 Recognize/show appreciation to all staff.
- 6 Advocate for competitive pay and benefits.
- 7 Provide employees with the resources (e.g., IT support, training, equipment, hardware, software, apps) and space needed to do their work.
- 8 Align and implement work schedules (e.g., alternative, flexible, and/or remote work) that enhance flexibility, efficiency, and result in excellent service to the public.



See the Courts' 2021-2022 Operational Plan for a list of the Courts' annual strategic projects.



**Strategic Focus Area 3:
ENHANCE EFFICIENT AND TIMELY COURT OPERATIONS
AND FAIR RESOLUTION**

The Courts' mission is to administer justice and restore wholeness in a manner that inspires public trust. Administering justice timely and fairly maintains the rule of law, ensures a civil society, and preserves our democracy. The Courts remain committed to resolving disputes and legal matters in a fair and timely manner and ensuring efficient case processing and court operations so as to strengthen the public's trust.

External partners provided the following observations and feedback related to this strategic focus area through the 2020 Strategic Planning Survey.

CHALLENGES/ISSUES

The biggest challenges/emerging issues facing the Courts in the next 3-5 years were:

- The time it takes to resolve legal matters;
- Fair and equal treatment (e.g., racial justice, DEI);
- Public trust and confidence in the courts; and
- Use of technology.

ACCESS BARRIERS

The most significant barrier to accessing/using the Courts in these Planning Survey responses was the length of time scheduled court events take away from work/home.



CHANGES/IMPROVEMENTS

Related to this strategic focus area, the most wanted changes/improvements were:

- Greater use of alternative dispute resolution (e.g., mediation, arbitration, online dispute resolution - ODR);
- Timely resolution of cases/disputes; and
- Pursue criminal justice system reform (e.g., bail/bond reform, alternatives to incarceration).

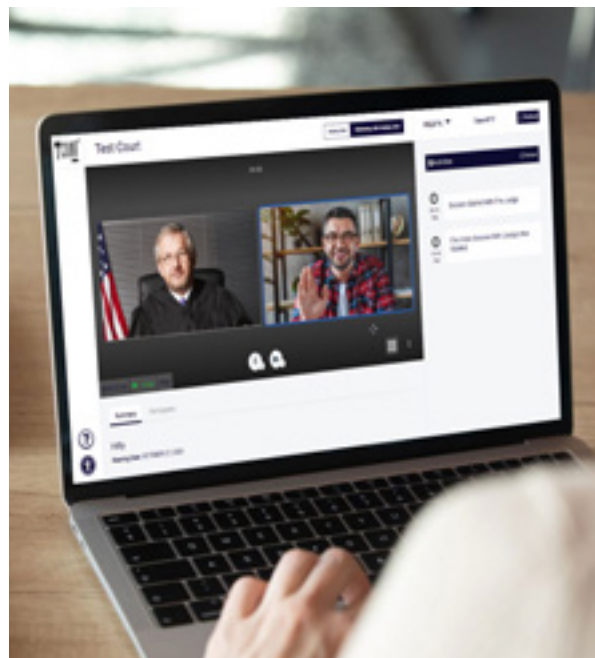


Employees provided the following suggestions for improvements related to this strategic focus area:

- 1 Continue Zoom hearings.
- 2 Simplify and expand e-filing.
- 3 Improve the technology interface - increase/simplify access to court and case information.
- 4 Expand legal representation/court appointed counsel for civil matters.
- 5 Simplify court processes (e.g., clearer/consistent check in process; provide written correspondence via email)
- 6 Expand mediation/alternative dispute resolution (ADR).
- 7 Expedite case processing and case resolution (e.g., reduce wait times, improve case management, redesign workflow to be more efficient - faster scheduling, notifications, etc.)

In addition to the above, this strategic focus area includes:

- 1 Simplifying and helping litigants/attorneys navigate complicated court processes and procedures.
- 2 Streamlining/automating work processes and court operations.
- 3 Measuring and improving court performance (e.g., time to resolution, age of pending cases, etc.) and sharing performance measures with the public.
- 4 Evaluating and improving policies, procedures, and practices ensuring they are fair to all and ensure equitable impact across all groups.



LONG RANGE GOALS AND STRATEGIES

Goal 1: The Courts will resolve legal matters and disputes in a fair and timely manner.

STRATEGIES:

- 1 Reduce the time it takes away from work and home to do business with the Courts (e.g., reduce wait times, conduct select court hearings/matters remotely, etc.).
- 2 Improve/strengthen caseflow management practices.
- 3 Use appropriate technologies to increase communication and efficiency of trials/hearings.
- 4 Measure court performance on key metrics and share results widely.
- 5 Evaluate policies, procedures, and practices to ensure they are fair to all and have an equitable impact across all groups.
- 6 Expand use of alternative dispute resolution (ADR) including mediation and online dispute resolution (ODR).
- 7 Expand legal assistance to self-represented litigants in civil matters.
- 8 Implement criminal justice reform in collaboration with justice and community partners.
- 9 Improve the technology interface and support making it easier to navigate remote hearings.
- 10 Reskill/upskill court staff to new, expanded roles to meet the needs of judges, litigants, and partners.

Goal 2: The Courts will operate and process cases efficiently and effectively.

STRATEGIES:

- 1 Automate and streamline case processing and work processes.
- 2 Provide litigants with assistance and resources to help navigate the legal process.
- 3 Include and collaborate with justice system partners to improve court processes and case processing ensuring equitable impact across all groups.
- 4 Ensure litigants, attorneys, and external partners understand what is required to resolve their cases/legal matters.



See the Courts' 2021-2022 Operational Plan for a list of the Courts' annual strategic projects.



Strategic Focus Area 4: ENHANCE FUNDING, RESOURCES, & FACILITIES



Adequate and stable funding are necessary for the Courts to fulfill their responsibilities and meet the growing needs of the people of Ottawa County. Sufficient resources (e.g., numbers of staff, technology, equipment, etc.) are essential for ensuring accessible, timely, and fair justice to the Ottawa County community. Additionally, the Courts' facilities must provide ample and modern space, be technologically equipped, and remain safe and secure for all to both serve the public and build the public's trust.

The Courts will continue to:

- Advocate for adequate and stable funding.
- Seek sufficient resources – technology, equipment, staff, and facilities – to enhance access, expand programming and services, and resolve cases in a fair and timely manner.
- Collaborate with County leadership to ensure the funding, resource, and facility needs of the Courts are met.
- Use resources transparently and responsibly.
- Educate the public justice community and County partners about the Courts' needs and priorities.

LONG RANGE GOALS AND STRATEGIES

Goal 1: The Courts will have adequate and stable funding and resources.

STRATEGIES:

- 1 Advocate and demonstrate the need for funding and resources to support the Courts' needs, programs, and services (e.g., LSHC, IT support staff, Recovery Court, etc.).
- 2 Demonstrate the responsible use of public funds and resources to the Board of Commissioners and public at large.
- 3 Pursue supplemental funding when needed.
- 4 Implement cost neutral and cost saving measures where possible.
- 5 Advocate for universal Internet access, including expanded broadband service throughout the County.
- 6 Align funding and resource priorities with the recommendations of statewide initiatives like the Justice for All Commission, Trial Court Funding Commission, and the Michigan Joint Task Force on Jail and Pretrial Incarceration.

See the Courts' 2021-2022 Operational Plan for a list of the Courts' annual strategic projects.

Goal 2: The Courts' facilities will be modern, technologically equipped, safe, and secure.

STRATEGIES:

- 1 Collaborate with County partners on building the Family Justice Center.
- 2 Strengthen safety and security in all court locations including physical, psychological, and cyber security.
- 3 Re-assess space needs and use space efficiently and effectively.
- 4 Secure and maintain adequate space for court users when accessing or providing services in the community.



APPENDIX A: SUMMARY OF ACCOMPLISHMENTS (2004-2020)

The Courts have accomplished many priority projects between 2004 - 2020 thanks to the dedication and hard work of the Strategic Action and Divisional Teams. Below is a partial list of accomplishments that are directly or indirectly related to the Courts' Strategic Plans since the inaugural Strategic Plan was released in 2004.

2004 - "STRATEGIC PLANNING"

- 1 Completed first court-wide Strategic Plan
- 2 Expanded the ADR plan to include domestic relations and probate cases
- 3 Completed a Caseflow Management Plan
- 4 Introduced a court-wide publication, The Court Communicator
- 5 Implemented the juvenile Drug Treatment Court
- 6 Completed the MiCSES conversion

2005 - "THE ADVENT OF DRUG TREATMENT COURTS"

- 1 Implemented the adult-felony Drug Treatment Court
- 2 Introduced Interactive Video Technology (IVT) and Video Conferencing capabilities
- 3 Implemented a web-based case management system in Juvenile Services (Courtstream)
- 4 Created the Citizen's Advisory Council

2006 - "OTTAWA COUNTY COURTHOUSE PLANNING"

- 1 Conducted the first Court User Survey
- 2 Developed the Master Technology Plan
- 3 Expedited the custody process in FOC
- 4 Expanded fine/fee payment options for the public (Telephone and Internet; www.miottawa.org)
- 5 Completed initial planning efforts for the new Ottawa County Courthouse
- 6 Created the "You and The Courts" educational video

2007 - "COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS"

- 1 Expanded bed rental contracts in the Juvenile Detention Center
- 2 Launched the student intern program
- 3 Implemented the Guardianship Training Program
- 4 Hosted the first Professionals Advocating and Caring for Kids (P.A.C.K.) meeting, though similar events date back to the 1990's
- 5 Implemented a new imaging system, using OnBase software

- 6 Introduced the first Court Employee Satisfaction Survey
- 7 Hosted the first Bench/Bar Meeting

2008 - "ACCESS TO JUSTICE: RESPONDING TO THE COMMUNITY"

- 1 Began planning for a Courthouse Learning Center in the new Ottawa County Courthouse
- 2 Began planning for a Legal Self-Help Center in the new Ottawa County Courthouse
- 3 Implemented the "Community Report Card" for Juvenile Services
- 4 Juvenile Services launched the Adventures in Mentoring (AIM) program in partnership with the Michigan State University Extension
- 5 Implemented the Victim Support Services Program in Juvenile Services
- 6 Completed the Access and Fairness Survey, an updated version of the "Court User Survey" adapted from the NCSC CourTools
- 7 Updated the Courts' Strategic Plan

2009 - "INSPIRING PUBLIC TRUST"

- 1 Opened the new Ottawa County Courthouse
- 2 Opened the Legal Self-Help Center
- 3 Forty-three staff successfully completed the Court Management Program through the National Center for State Courts - Institute for Court Management
- 4 Implemented the female-specific Lighthouse Program in the Juvenile Detention Center
- 5 Completed the second Court Employee Satisfaction Survey

2010 - "RE-THINKING THE COURTS"

- 1 Leadership Team members completed the NCSC's Court Executive Development Program and implemented the Building Bench Strength Program within the 20th Circuit and Ottawa County Probate Courts
- 2 Introduced FOC Booting Project
- 3 Revamped the Juvenile Services reimbursement program
- 4 Legal Self-Help Center served 2,500+ patrons during its first year of operation
- 5 Opened the Challenge Ropes Course to community groups
- 6 Completed the third Access and Fairness Survey
- 7 Published the Ottawa County Judicial Biography book

2011 - "RE-ENGINEERING THE COURTS"

- 1 Implemented performance measures through the use of NCSC CourTools
- 2 Developed the Citizen's Law School as part of annual Law Day celebrations

- 3 Implemented the Electronic Judges Calendar through MICA
- 4 Launched the Juvenile Justice Vision 20/20 initiative
- 5 Introduced the Arrears Forgiveness Program in FOC
- 6 Implemented use of Writs to Intercept State of Michigan income tax refunds from litigants who owed outstanding financial obligations to the Court
- 7 Completed the third Court Employee Satisfaction Survey
- 8 Opened FOC satellite office in Holland

2012 – “MEASURING SUCCESS”

- 1 Conducted several High-Performance Court Framework workshops with the NCSC
- 2 Reviewed and updated Court information on the County’s website - www.miottawa.org
- 3 Trial Division collections surpassed \$1,000,000
- 4 Implemented the Shakespeare Behind Bars program in JJI and the OCJDC
- 5 Legal Self-Help Center expanded to offer services at the Probate Court
- 6 Ottawa FOC selected as a pilot county for the new state program; Compromise Arrears in Return for On-Time Support (CAROTS)
- 7 Completed the fourth Access and Fairness Survey

2013 – “HIGH PERFORMING COURTS”

- 1 Probate Register completed the NCSC’s Court Executive Development Program and plans to implement a Volunteer Guardianship Program
- 2 Completed the fourth Court Employee Satisfaction Survey
- 3 Developed and implemented a Business Court Plan
- 4 Developed a Concurrent Jurisdiction Plan
- 5 Expanded the Legal Self-Help Center to include a satellite office in Holland
- 6 Completed the “Framing of the Judges” project

2014 – “MAKING A DIFFERENCE”

- 1 Conducted successful all staff training with Dr. Roger Hall
- 2 Collaborated with Sheriff’s Department to add second deputy to FOC Bench Warrant Team
- 3 Worked with Mediation Services to certify additional court employees
- 4 Fulfilled statutory duties with Child Death Review Team
- 5 Implemented YLS (Youth Level of Services) Risk/Needs Assessment program
- 6 Successfully completed a Michigan Supreme Court financial audit
- 7 Developed a Technology Action Plan with NCSC
- 8 Installed “Lady Justice” display as part of Law Day activities
- 9 Hosted the first Domestic Relations Law Summit

- 10 Completed review and updating of the Courts’ Strategic Plan

2015 – “MAKING A DIFFERENCE”

- 1 Trained Treatment staff in and implemented evidence-based Functional Family Therapy
- 2 Friend of the Court office absorbed paternity establishment responsibilities from the Prosecuting Attorney
- 3 The Juvenile Detention Center received high marks in the American Correctional Association (ACA) certification process
- 4 Probate staff received recognition for exemplary customer service
- 5 92% of youth were successfully discharged from supervision
- 6 Felony collections exceeded \$1 million for the fifth consecutive year

2016 – “FULFILLING OUR MISSION”

- 1 Hosted the courts’ first Volunteer Appreciation Day
- 2 Conducted an active shooter drill in the courthouse in Grand Haven to promote staff awareness and safety
- 3 Received County Innovation Grant award to add a third Sheriff’s Deputy and FOC Account Clerk to Friend of the Court bench warrant team
- 4 Met or exceeded almost 100% of SCAO Performance Measures
- 5 Participated in review and selection of a new Jury System vendor to improve juror satisfaction, jury performance measures and reduce juror-related costs
- 6 Obtained significant grant funding for the Adult Drug Treatment Court
- 7 Updated Emergency Site Plans for West Olive and Grand Haven court locations
- 8 Friend of the Court office was recognized by the Michigan Office of Child Support as “Top Performing Large Sized County in the State”
- 9 Reduced the number of juveniles in residential placement from thirteen to three
- 10 Juvenile probation violations were reduced by 10%
- 11 The Legal Self-Help Center assisted 4,480 individuals
- 12 The 20th Circuit, 58th District and Ottawa County Probate Courts hosted the Michigan Supreme Court at the Jenison Performing Arts Center for the Community Corrections Program. Nearly 1,300 high school students attended to hear oral arguments
- 13 Transitioned leadership under Chief Judge Jon Van Allsburg
- 14 The Friend of the Court office piloted a digital check-in process for staff

2017 – “ADMINISTERING JUSTICE”

- 1 Welcomed and trained new Circuit Court judge Karen J. Miedema
- 2 Reviewed and developed a new 2018-2020 Strategic Plan
- 3 Expanded female-specific treatment in Lighthouse from eight to sixteen participants
- 4 Implemented a music program for juvenile offenders

- 5 Moved the Juvenile Justice Institute and Treatment Services Division in Holland to a larger facility to expand programming and education for youth
- 6 Contracted with Grand Valley State University to analyze Youth Level of Service (YLS) data
- 7 95% of all juveniles reduced or maintained their overall YLS level (risk to offend)
- 8 Analyzed state court data and drafted a report on the state's Raise the Age/Youth in Prison initiative
- 9 Prepared and submitted a Compliance Plan related to the Michigan Indigent Defense Commission legislation
- 10 Added a third Sheriff's Deputy to Juvenile Court staff
- 11 Fully implemented EPICS in juvenile probation with internal coaches maintaining validity (moved fully away from the University of Cincinnati Corrections Institute)
- 12 Graduated four youth from the Juvenile Justice Institute
- 13 Created a Court Employee Orientation Manual
- 14 Circulated "thank you" cards to all Circuit and Probate Court volunteers, including the Legal Self-Help Center and Juvenile Detention Center volunteers
- 15 Juvenile Court conducted legislative tours and hosted a community meeting to help educate and build support for Court programs
- 16 Conducted the first Active Shooter drill in West Olive courthouse and implemented recommendations based on the training
- 17 Earned approximately \$1.2 million dollars in revenue for out-of-county bed rentals for the Juvenile Detention Center
- 18 Transitioned juvenile and parental reimbursement to Clerk/Register of Deeds' Office
- 19 Implemented a new security team for the Juvenile/Probate Court in West Olive to support measures to improve security and quality of the building for employees and clients
- 20 Transitioned to a new provider, Wedgwood, for adolescent substance abuse treatment (detention and community) to increase services available to clients and diversifying our use of PA2 Funds and Medicaid
- 21 Expanded Ropes Course programming to include summer "camps"
- 22 Completed a second year of Functional Family Therapy and trained a therapist as an on-site coach
- 23 Successfully completed the Probate Court microfilm records project, converting decades of physical probate files to digital files for historical and genealogical use
- 24 Implemented an Alternative Work Location (AWL) pilot project to provide greater schedule flexibility for employees
- 25 Met or exceeded most state and federal performance standards
- 26 Implemented the Matterhorn ODR (online dispute resolution) software for child support show cause hearings
- 27 Collected more than \$39M in child support

2018 – "RESTORING WHOLENESS"

- 1 Circuit and Probate met or exceeded most SCAO performance measures
- 2 FOC met or exceeded Office of Child Support performance measures
- 3 Juvenile Detention expanded Lighthouse Residential Program and generated more than \$1.2 million in bed rental contracts
- 4 Trial Division felony collections exceeded \$1M for 6th year
- 5 Probate staff received recognition for exemplary customer service

- 6 FOC continues as a state leader in child support collection (\$39M) and effective use of mediation
- 7 Juvenile Court moved the Juvenile Justice Institute and Treatment Services to expand services (e.g., Functional Family Therapy, music program)
- 8 Focused on employee safety with updated security plans and active shooter drills
- 9 Recovery Court served as 1 of 9 "Mentor Courts" in the United States
- 10 Felony Collections Program collected \$1,210,943 (46% Restitution)
- 11 Successful onboarding of new Trial Division Director
- 12 Successful integration of new BIS technology
- 13 FOC Collected \$9.96 for Every \$1.00 Spent
- 14 FOC earned \$466,586 in Federal Incentives
- 15 FOC added 3rd Deputy and Account Specialist through the County Innovation Grant
- 16 Implemented Online Dispute Resolution
- 17 Juvenile Detention Center passed American Corrections Association (ACA) audit with 100% on 32 mandatory standards and 99.6% on 290 non-mandatory standards
- 18 Doubled capacity of Girls Lighthouse Treatment Program
- 19 Improved Website Services for Probate Clients
- 20 Effective use of Mediation Services to resolve sensitive family issues
- 21 Probate Court carefully monitored estate finances and conservator accountings
- 22 Successful upgrades of BIS audio/video recording systems for capture of official court record

2019 – "INSPIRING PUBLIC TRUST"

- 1 Successful Public Satisfaction Survey Results:
 - 92% of court users said they were treated with courtesy and respect by court staff.
 - 88% of court users said the way the judge or attorney referee handled their case was fair.
 - 84% of court users were able to get their business done in a reasonable amount of time.
- 2 Began planning for Family Justice Center
- 3 Hosted "We the People" high school competition practice session with Black River Public School
- 4 Probate Court implemented MiFile electronic filing system
- 5 Assisted with transition of court appointed counsel system and development of Ottawa County Public Defender Office
- 6 Juvenile Court began Youth Level of Service risk/needs assessment (YLS) data analysis project
- 7 Partnered with Pine Rest through Employee Assistance Program to provide staff training
- 8 Began implementation of SmartBench technology for Probate and Circuit judges
- 9 Completed technology gap analysis with court staff
- 10 Implemented Child Protection Mediation through partnership with Mediation Services
- 11 Participated in statewide Justice for All Taskforce
- 12 Participated in Constitution Day celebration with Corpus Christi School
- 13 Judges and judicial officers completed Judicial Resources Report time study for State Court Administrative Office
- 14 Staff participated in Community Policing through Environmental Design (CPTED) Security Training
- 15 Leadership Connect presentation to Tri-Cities Chamber of Commerce

- 16 Implemented Child Parent Legal Representation grant

2020 – “REACHING FOR A BETTER NORMAL”

- 1 Hosted “We the People” high school competition practice session with Black River Public School
- 2 Began teaching kitchen programming
- 3 Developed courtwide Social Media policy and created court pages on five social media platforms
- 4 Participated in case management system request for proposals and subsequent vendor demonstrations
- 5 Provided courthouse tours for school groups, including Grand Haven Christian School
- 6 Completed transition for Juvenile Court Director position and Probate Register position
- 7 Participated in Ottawa County Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) assessment and listening sessions
- 8 Worked with Pew Charitable Trust on ODR evaluation
- 9 Participated with Michigan Opioid Taskforce
- 10 Updated emergency site plans
- 11 Transitioned to additional online services and hearings as a result of COVID-19 pandemic
- 12 Juvenile Justice Institute awarded high school diplomas to several graduates
- 13 Developed public defender request for proposals for the juvenile delinquency and child welfare dockets
- 14 Probate Court completed MiFile gap analysis
- 15 Completed review of employee job descriptions for County wage study
- 16 Supported several Juvenile Justice Vision 20/20 educational programs
- 17 Hosted virtual Adoption Day celebration
- 18 Due to COVID-19, conducted courts’ first annual All Staff Meeting on a virtual platform
- 19 Successfully negotiated collective bargaining agreements with FOC and Juvenile employee associations
- 20 Convened Strategic Planning Team to review and update Circuit and Probate Court Strategic Plan

APPENDIX B: COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS

State trial courts are known for their independence and ability to deliver fair and just results in individual cases without being impacted by political or public pressures. Beyond the role of decision maker in individual cases, however, state trial courts must maintain strong collaborative partnerships within the community to effectively provide necessary services for a variety of court users. In Ottawa County, the 20th Circuit and Probate Courts have long standing relationships with County leaders, state professional associations, national court organizations, technology providers, educational institutions, and service providers to ensure high performance and excellent customer service.

- Arbor Circle
- Barnabas Ministries
- Bethany Christian Services
- BizStream
- BRAINS of West Michigan
- Bureau of Justice Assistance
- Catholic Charities of West Michigan
- Extended Grace
- Friend of the Court Association
- Grand Valley State University
- ImageSoft
- Institute for Intergovernmental Research
- Juvenile Justice Vision 20/20
- Mediation Services
- Mentis Technology
- Michigan Association for Family Court Administration
- Michigan Association of Circuit Court Administrators
- Michigan Association of Counties
- Michigan Association of Treatment Court Professionals
- Michigan Association of Juvenile and Probate Court Registers
- Michigan Committee on Juvenile Justice
- Michigan Department of Health and Human Services
- Michigan Department of Technology, Management and Budget
- Michigan Judges Association
- Michigan Juvenile Detention Association
- Michigan Probate Judges Association
- National Association for Court Management
- National Center for State Courts
- National Judicial College
- Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention
- Ottawa Area Intermediate School District
- Ottawa County Administration and related County Departments
- Ottawa County Bar Association
- Ottawa County Sheriff’s Office
- Pine Rest Christian Mental Health Services
- Resilience
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)
- State Court Administrative Office
- State Justice Institute
- University of Michigan Data Lab
- Walk the Beat
- Wedgwood Christian Services

APPENDIX C: TRENDS DATA – EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL

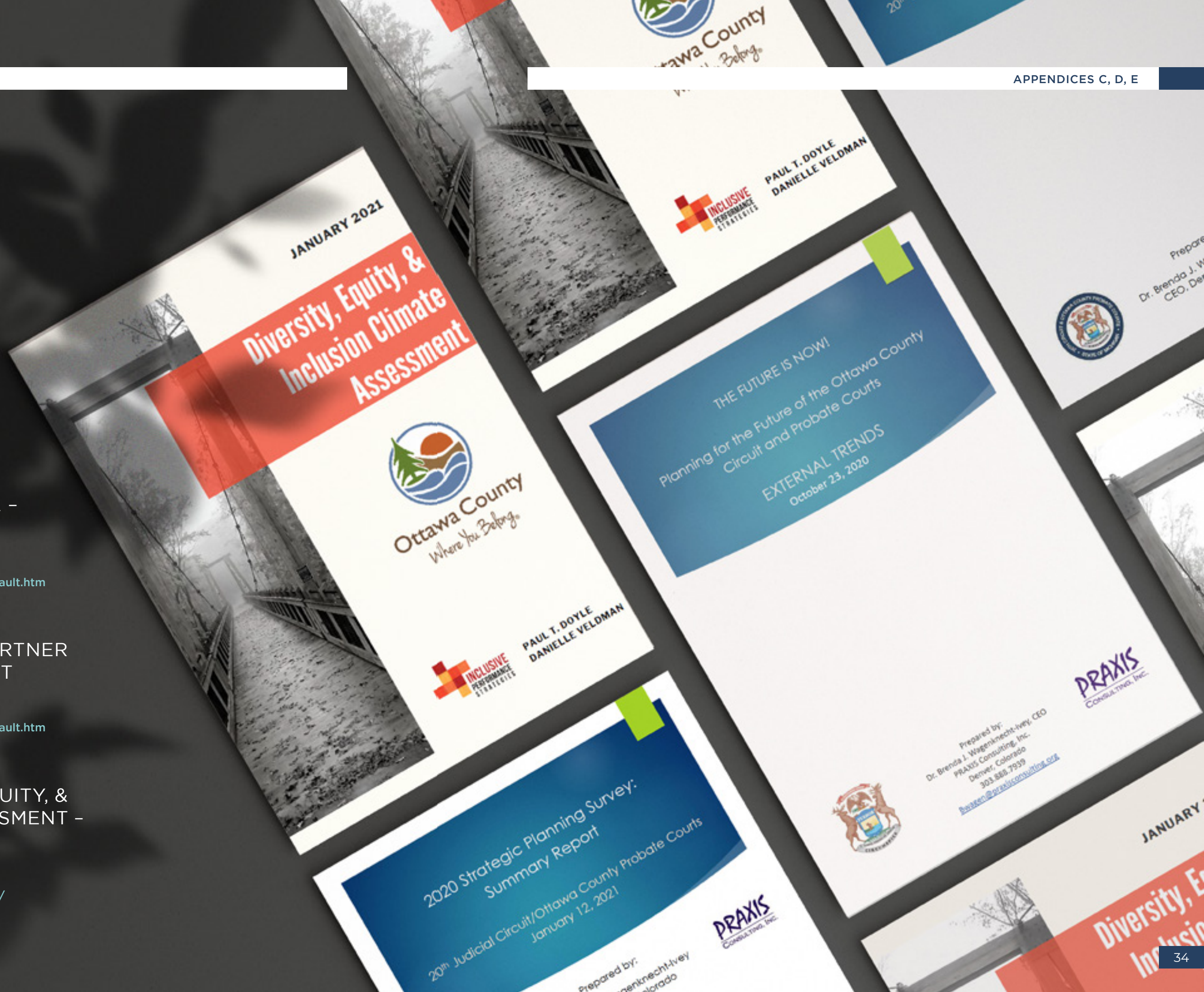
View the report:
<https://www.miottawa.org/Courts/20thcircuit/default.htm>

APPENDIX D: EXTERNAL PARTNER SURVEY – SUMMARY REPORT

View the report:
<https://www.miottawa.org/Courts/20thcircuit/default.htm>

APPENDIX E: DIVERSITY, EQUITY, & INCLUSION CLIMATE ASSESSMENT – JANUARY 2021

View the report:
<https://www.miottawa.org/Departments/Diversity/>





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