



2019 – 2021 Strategic Plan

Berrien County Trial Court

January 31, 2019

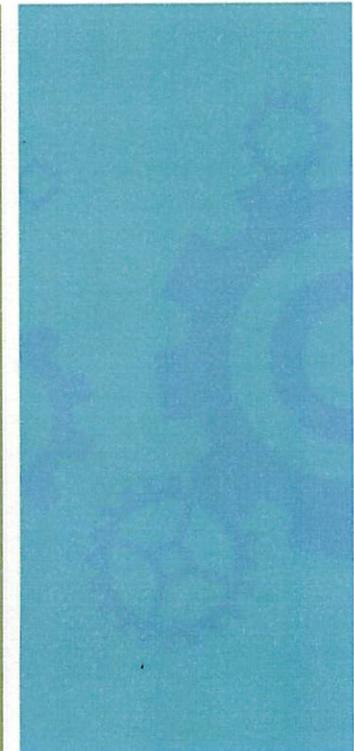
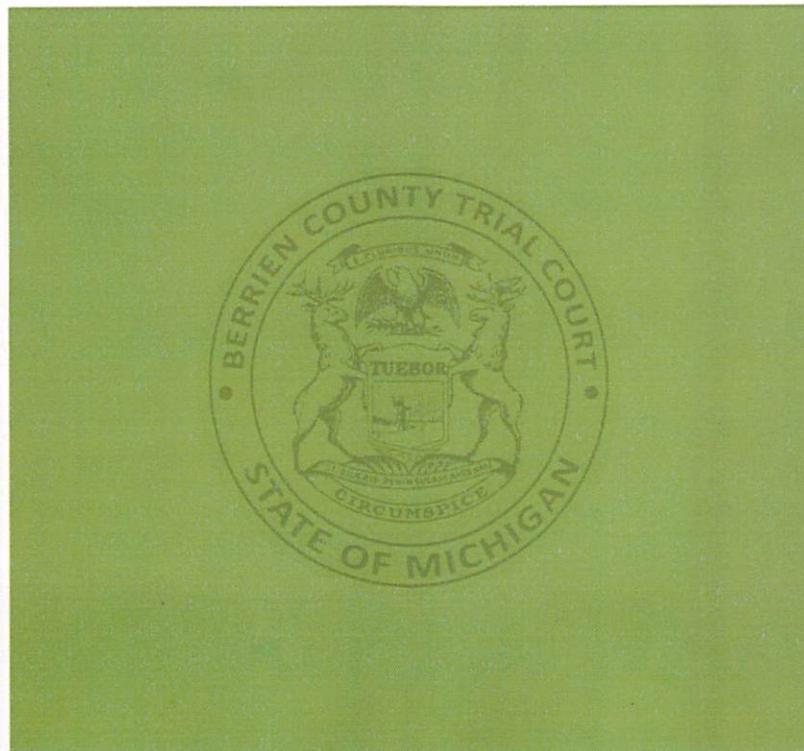


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Supporting Work – Available Upon Request

A: 2018 Strategic Planning Surveys – Summary of Findings

B: Trends Information



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Berrien County Trial Court

Gary J. Bruce, Chief Judge ~ Carrie Smietanka-Haney, Administrator

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We are pleased to present the Berrien County Trial Court's 2019-2021 Strategic Plan. The Strategic Plan represents the Court's mission: *Serve the public ensuring fair and timely justice for all*. A great deal of analysis was conducted to create this strategic plan, including public/partner and employee surveys as well as national, state, and local trends. The Strategic Plan is the result of much hard work and dedication from the judicial and administrative teams with financial support from the State Justice Institute and services through PRAXIS Consulting.

The Berrien County Trial Court recognized in late 2017 that there had been a significant period of time lapsed without reviewing and updating foundational topics such as the Court's mission and vision. That realization was accompanied with a change in leadership positions both in the judiciary and court administration. The Court's Judicial Council determined that it was in the Court's best interest to enter into significant strategic planning in order to set and accomplish goals for improving the overall service to the public. Strategic planning occurred throughout 2018 and has resulted in the attached strategic plan.

The Trial Court has identified key results to be accomplished for each strategy contained in the plan. It is the hope of the Berrien County Trial Court that the efforts put forth by all participants to develop the strategic plan will come to fruition through the implementation of various projects designed to meet the focus areas identified in the planning process.

Your input and participation helped direct this plan, and we ask for your continued support for the Trial Court in achieving these strategic initiatives. Thank you for your assistance and your dedication to the justice community of Berrien County.

Regards,

Honorable Gary J. Bruce
Chief Judge

Carrie Smietanka-Haney
Trial Court Administrator

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2019-2021 Strategic Plan

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Section 1: Overview/Introduction

The Berrien County Trial Court (BCTC), a unified trial court in southwest Michigan comprised of the District, Probate, and Circuit Courts, embarked on long-range strategic planning process in the spring of 2018. With grant assistance from the State Justice Institute (SJI), the BCTC developed a Strategic Plan that will lay out a future direction and priorities for the coming years.

Berrien County borders Indiana and Lake Michigan. The Court provides services from two locations: the primary courthouse in Saint Joseph, Michigan and an ancillary facility in Niles, Michigan. The Court also operates a juvenile center with secure detention and a residential treatment program in Berrien Center. The Court has eleven judges and approximately 230 staff. The Court has a higher than average caseload for its population (e.g., double the caseload of similarly sized counties) and is experiencing an increasing demand for services.

The BCTC last engaged in strategic planning in 2003. The 2018 process helped the Court define a vision of the future and establish long-term goals and strategies for enhancing court performance (e.g., access, timeliness, etc.) and court services. It was an opportunity to identify needed improvements and changes that will enhance the Court's services, performance, and work culture. The Court and the Berrien County community will benefit greatly from this effort.

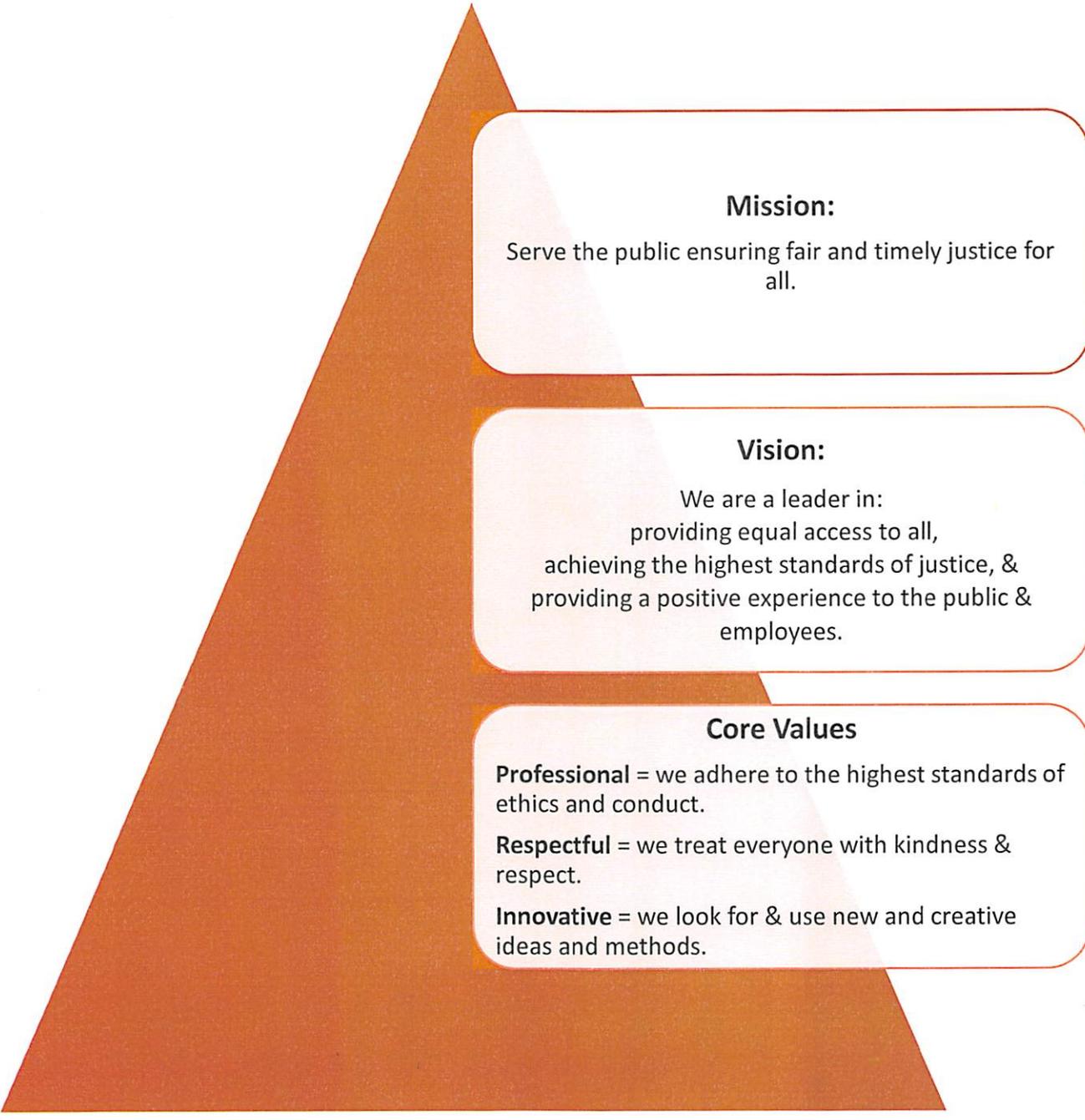
Dr. Brenda J. Wagenknecht-Ivey, CEO of PRAXIS Consulting, Inc., facilitated the Court's planning process. It included a survey by the Court of justice system partners, judges, and employees in the spring of 2018. It also included a series of meetings with a Strategic Planning Team to:

- Develop mission, vision, and core values.
- Analyze external and internal trends.
- Review the survey results.
- Identify key, strategic focus areas and long-range goals and strategies for making improvements.
- Identify specific, strategic initiatives.

The Team also developed an implementation plan and approach that will ensure follow-through. Strategic initiatives for the first year were identified and will be reviewed regularly and updated annually.

Section 2: Mission, Vision, and Core Values

The mission, vision and core values of the Berrien County Trial Court are below.



Mission:

Serve the public ensuring fair and timely justice for all.

Vision:

We are a leader in:
providing equal access to all,
achieving the highest standards of justice, &
providing a positive experience to the public &
employees.

Core Values

Professional = we adhere to the highest standards of ethics and conduct.

Respectful = we treat everyone with kindness & respect.

Innovative = we look for & use new and creative ideas and methods.

Section 3: Trends Analysis – Future Implications

The Strategic Planning Team reviewed a variety of trends impacting the Court in the future. External trends included social and demographic, economic, policy/political, technological, and juvenile justice trends. Internal trends included caseload, dispositions, pending caseload, specialty courts, budget, programs/services, and employee demographics.

Below are likely future implications for the Court.

1. **Equal Access.** Providing equal access to all needs to be high priority in the future. This includes providing easier access to court and case information, services and assistance, and the like. Using technology to enhance electronic access also is critically important in the future (e.g., e-filing, texting notifications, video-conferencing, paying fines/fees online, accessing information on the website, online dispute resolution, etc.). Finally, the Court will need to work to eliminate/minimize barriers to access such as hours of operation, cost, transportation, and language.
2. **Composition of Court Users.** The composition of court users will continue to change. More self-represented, elderly, racially and culturally diverse, non-English speaking, people with mental health and substance abuse issues, etc. will likely use the Court in the future. Providing new and expanding existing services, making the Court more user-friendly, and ensuring procedures are understandable will be increasingly important in the future. The Court must prepare now so it is able to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse population.
3. **Composition of Cases.** The composition and complexity of case types are changing. The Court must be nimble in the future. It must be able to monitor and shift judicial and court resources as needed to respond to changing workloads.
4. **Operational Efficiency.** Processing and managing cases (and workloads) efficiently and effectively will be important in the future. Effective scheduling, reducing wait times, improving/streamlining work processes are examples of improvements needed.
5. **Technology.** Technology is constantly changing, improving, and evolving. The Court must be able to adapt and improve technology to enhance access, services, and operational efficiency. Court employees also need to know how to use available technology to enhance efficiency and services to court users. Court rules and laws also will need to be updated to stay current/ahead of technological changes. Staying up with the times will be challenging given the pace and associated costs of technological change.
6. **Case Outcomes.** Measuring/evaluating case results is on the rise. Using evidence-based practices (e.g., risk/needs assessments) and other innovative practices for early assessment, sentencing, and supervision/monitoring are proving important to help reduce risk to the community, help youth and litigants succeed, reduce recidivism, etc. Providing effective treatment plans and tools also are necessary. In addition to holding defendants accountable for their actions, it is important be responsive to the needs of victims. Achieving a just outcome includes reducing the victimization of victims and responding to their needs. In short, it will be

increasingly important for the Court to implement practices that will achieve effective case outcomes (for defendants, litigants, families, victims, and the community).

7. Staffing. It is becoming increasingly difficult to recruit and retain a skilled, experienced, and diverse workforce. And, a relatively large number of managers/employees will be eligible to retire within the next few years. Consequently, the Court is vulnerable. The Court will need to make changes that will make the court a sought-after place to work, develop the next generation of managers/workers, retain institutional knowledge, and engage and satisfy the workforce.
8. Funding and Other Resources. Having adequate monetary and non-monetary resources (i.e., funding, staff, technology, etc.) will likely be an ongoing challenge for the Court. The Court will continually need to look for innovative ways to use its limited resources efficiently and effectively (e.g., do more with less as well as do less with less).
9. Collaborative Relations. The Court needs to continue to develop positive, collaborative relations with community, justice system partners, and stakeholders. Developing partnerships, enhancing communication, and improving transparency are needed in the future.
10. Public Trust and Education. Developing the public's trust and confidence are essential. Reaching out to and educating the public/community about the Court will be increasingly important in the future.

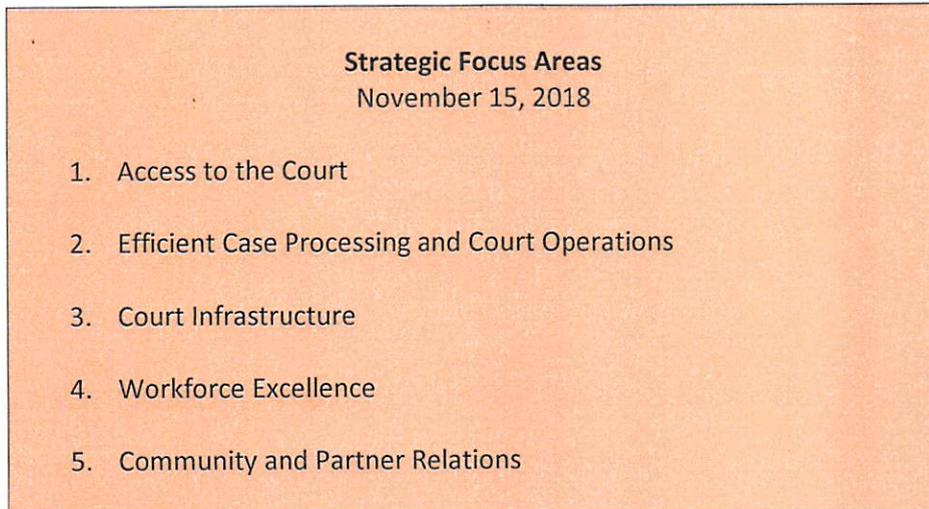
Section 4: Organizational Assessment – Summary of Strategic Planning and Public Satisfaction Surveys

Summary of Strengths and Opportunities for Improvement

Strengths	Areas/Opportunities for Improvement
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Accessibility of the court – language, ADA, hours 2. Facilities/security 3. Accessibility of judges 4. Judges and staff – knowledgeable, courteous, friendly; seasoned/experienced workforce; institutional knowledge 5. Job satisfaction – staff feel heard, clear expectations, caring supervisors, implementation of employee friendly initiatives (alternative work schedules) 6. Encouraged to work across areas (break down silos) 7. Confidence in leadership 8. Quality/effectiveness – willingness to take a critical look, learn, and improve 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Timeliness – timely resolution, taking the bench on time 2. Perception of fairness 3. Access to records/information 4. Use of technology 5. Providing better assistance to self-represented litigants 6. Ensuring litigants know what they need to do when they leave court (procedural fairness) 7. Public outreach and education – PR for the Court 8. Communication – internal and external 9. Transparency 10. Turnover and succession planning 11. Finding/making time to do train and cross train (within and between departments) 12. Compensation levels 13. Resistance to change – some have a mindset - this is how we have always done it

Section 5: Strategic Focus Areas, Long-Range Goals, and Objectives

The Strategic Planning Team identified 5 strategic focus areas (SFAs) to work on in the future to advance the Court and help it achieve its mission and vision. The strategic focus areas (SFAs) are:



SFA 1: Access to the Court (Information, Services, and Programs)

Description: The Berrien Trial Court is committed to providing equal access to all. This includes enhancing access to information, services, and programs and eliminating barriers to access. It also includes enhancing and expanding treatment and aftercare services for litigants, youth, and families.

The demographics of the County, and thus the needs of court users, are changing. To ensure equal access to justice, the Court must adapt and respond to the changing needs ensuring the Court is accessible, user-friendly, understandable, and provides needed services and programs.

According to the 2018 Strategic Planning Survey, areas for improvement include:

1. Ability to do business with the Court remotely/electronically (e.g., e-filing, pay fines/fees; access to case information)
2. Providing assistance to people who represent themselves/cannot afford an attorney (i.e., self-represented litigants);
3. A growing need for legal assistance and services (e.g., criminal, civil, self-represented litigants);
4. Language assistance to people who are not fluent in English;
5. Simplifying court procedures, processes, and forms making them more understandable;
6. Providing answers to questions as court users arrive at court;
7. The cost of hiring an attorney;
8. The distance people must travel, or difficulties getting, to court; and
9. Increasing need for/access to treatment services (e.g., substance abuse, mental health, family counseling, etc.).

Long Range Goals and Objectives:

Goal 1: All court users have easy access to information and tools/resources to improve their court experience.

Objective 1: Increase availability of information and resources to assist court users.

Objective 2: Increase electronic/online access to court information and the Court.

Objective 3: Increase employees' cross-divisional knowledge and understanding to assist court users.

Objective 4: Educate litigants and partners on court procedures, processes, and requirements.

Goal 2: The Court provides access to services and programs that meet the needs of court users.

Objective 1: Assess and improve the quality of programs and services used by the Court.

Objective 2: Use data to determine programming needs and outcomes.

Objective 3: Identify and expand a network of community-based services.

2019 Strategic Projects:

1. Review, update, and develop SRL materials and resources.
2. Develop/implement a quality assurance program to evaluate services/outcomes from 3rd party providers.
3. Create tools/resources for staff to assist court users.

SFA 2: Efficient Case Processing and Court Operations

Description: The Court's mission is to serve the public by providing fair and timely justice for all. To fulfill its mission, the Court is committed to resolving legal matters in a fair and timely manner, managing and processing cases efficiently, and ensuring efficient court operations. Meeting time standards, using best practices to schedule and manage cases, reducing unnecessary delay, focusing on outcome and procedural fairness, and streamlining/reengineering work processes are included in this strategic area.

Areas for improvement in this strategic focus area are as follows, according to the 2018 strategic planning survey:

1. Improving scheduling practices;
2. Starting court hearings on time – at the time they are scheduled to begin.
3. Resolving cases in a reasonable amount of time;
4. When at the courthouse, completing court business in a reasonable amount of time.
5. Treating court users equally and respectfully,
6. Ensuring court users understand what they need to do when they leave the courtroom/courthouse;
7. Handling cases fairly;
8. Reducing the time court business/hearings take away from work or home – reducing wait times and unnecessary delay;
9. Streamlining and standardizing court processes and procedures.

In addition to the above, the Court's technology is antiquated. The Court needs an effective case management system as well as other technology tools to enhance communication and efficiency (e.g., texting notifications, integrated systems making information easily accessible, electronic reminders, paying fines/fees online).

Long Range Goals and Objectives:

Goal 1: The Court will resolve matters efficiently and effectively.

Objective 1: Use innovative practices to increase court attendance.

Objective 2: Develop and implement documented policies and procedures for efficient processing of cases.

Objective 3: Implement a new, consolidated case management system.

Objective 4: Improve case management, court timeliness, and compliance with case management standards.

Goal 2: Judges and staff will provide the highest quality of customer service to all court users.

Objective 1: Treat all parties impartially and with respect.

Objective 2: Provide court users an opportunity to be heard – tell their side of the story/explain their situation.

Objective 3: Explain rulings/provide explanations for decisions about court users' case.

Objective 4: Ensure/help litigants understand what they need to do when they leave the courtroom/courthouse.

2019 Strategic Projects:

1. Implement new Case Management System
2. Implement a "Start Court on Time" Initiative
3. Reengineer Court Scheduling/Calendar practices

SFA 3: Court Infrastructure (Facilities and Technology)

Description: The Berrien County Trial Court needs facilities (including office space) that meet the current and future needs of court users, partners, judicial officers, and employees. Adequate – modern, spacious, clean, and safe – facilities are needed to build and enhance respect for the Court (judicial branch) and to enable the court to conduct business in an efficient and effective manner.

In addition, the Court must have and maintain technology infrastructure that provides easy access, efficient workflow, access to data, and other tools to enhance efficiency and effectiveness. Enhancing internal capacity and adding emerging technology resources and online tools are essential in the future.

Improvements are needed in the following areas:

1. Aging infrastructure (e.g., building, design, furniture).
2. Continually strengthen security (exterior, perimeter and internal), cyber security, and safety/emergency procedures.
3. Inadequate space (e.g., parking, jury room, meeting space for attorneys and litigants, offices, chambers and courtrooms, separate areas for victims and law enforcement, holding cells).
4. The Court has facilities in 3 locations.
5. Inadequate signage.
6. Antiquated/outdated technology (hardware, software, equipment).

Long Range Goals and Objectives:

Goal 1: The Court's facilities will meet the needs of all who access the Court.

- Objective 1: Modernize or improve existing Court/office space.
- Objective 2: Explore creative options for Court/office space.
- Objective 3: Advocate for and explore funding options for capital improvements.
- Objective 4: Build support for a new, centralized justice campus.
- Objective 5: Continue enhancing safety and security of court facilities.

Goal 2: The technology infrastructure will support existing and future needs of the Court.

- Objective 1: Maintain updated hardware, software, and equipment.
- Objective 2: Prepare for and use emerging technologies and tools.
- Objective 3: Enhance and improve the technology capacity at all locations.

2019 Strategic Projects:

1. Develop/implement a courtwide Security Notification System
2. Create a 4th Floor Child Waiting Area

SFA 4: Workforce Excellence

Description: The Court values its workforce and sees opportunities to make changes/improvements that will make the Court a great place to work. This includes using innovative methods to recruit and retain a skilled workforce, maintaining a positive and engaging work environment, developing employees, and ensuring judicial officers and staff are able to perform their jobs well.

According to the 2018 strategic planning survey, improvements are needed in the following areas:

1. Communication from Court leadership (e.g., keeping staff informed about what is going on at the Court and within and across Departments)
2. Improved management/supervision practices (e.g., soliciting and valuing the opinions of staff, giving performance feedback/performance management, communicating job expectations).
3. Employee recognition for doing their jobs well.
4. Building pride in (and connecting) the work of staff to the important mission of the Court (e.g., staff recognizing the importance of their job/work).
5. Providing opportunities to learn and grow (e.g., training and development, career advancement and mobility).
6. Providing competitive pay and benefits, and aligning job expectations with levels of pay.
7. Providing non-monetary benefits and perks (flexible/alternative schedules, work life balance).

Long Range Goals and Objectives:

Goal 1: The Court will have a positive and engaging work environment.

Objective 1: Ensure competitive pay and benefits.

Objective 2: Promote and prioritize work/life balance.

Objective 3: Regularly solicit employee input and feedback.

Objective 4: Create cross-departmental alignment and collaboration.

Objective 5: Enhance employee recognition and appreciation.

Objective 6: Provide and promote opportunities for job and career development.

Objective 7: Ensure regular communication with employees.

Objective 8: Continually strengthen leadership, management, and supervision practices.

Objective 9: Increase visibility and connections among judicial officers and staff.

Goal 2: Court employees will have the knowledge, skills, and abilities to perform their jobs.

Objective 1: Increase training and educational opportunities (informal and formal).

Objective 2: Establish and maintain a meaningful performance management system.

Objective 3: Develop the next generation of court leaders.

Goal 3: The Court will recruit and retain a skilled workforce.

Objective 1: Increase outreach regarding job opportunities.

Objective 2: Communicate/promote the Court's positive image.

Objective 3: Forge new relationships/partnerships with potential candidate pools.

Objective 4: Strengthen/enhance recruiting and retention practices.

2019 Strategic Projects:

1. Enhance Courtwide Employee Recognition and Appreciation Program
2. Enhance Employee Recruitment Policy and Practices
3. Develop/implement a Leadership Training/Academy for Managers and Supervisors

SFA 5: Community and Partner Relations

Description: Educating the public and strengthening justice system/community partnerships are very important to the future of the Berrien County Trial Court. The Court is committed to educating the public about the Court and increasing understanding and respect among the public. Reaching out to, engaging in dialogue, and sharing information with the public will be important in the future. In sum, building trust and confidence in the Court is a high priority.

Additionally, the Court needs to continue to strengthen relations with external partners. Increasing communication, forging new partnerships, coordinating services, and collaborating with stakeholders and partners to enhance services will yield many benefits. The Court will function more efficiently, and the services provided to court users/the public will be of higher quality.

Areas for improvement include:

1. Greater outreach to and education of the public.
2. Promoting the positive achievements of the Court.
3. Increased listening and dialogue with the public and partners.
4. Better communication, information sharing, and coordination among all agencies.

Long Range Goals and Objectives:

Goal 1: The public will understand and have a high level of trust and confidence in the Court.

Objective 1: Increase transparency by sharing information openly and honestly about the Court.

Objective 2: Reach out to, solicit input from, and engage in dialogue with the public.

Objective 3: Educate/inform the public about the Court's role, goals, and priorities.

Objective 4: Promote the positive achievements and performance of the Court.

Goal 2: The Court will have and maintain effective relationships with partners.

Objective 1: Learn about the needs and priorities of partners.

Objective 2: Develop methods to improve communication and information sharing.

Objective 3: Improve coordination and collaboration with partners to address justice system issues.

Objective 4: Communicate/share the Court's needs and priorities.

Objective 5: Use data to demonstrate needs and support changes.

2019 Strategic Projects:

1. Develop/implement a Social Media Presence/Strategy
2. Develop/improve Court Educational/Information materials (for use on Social Media)