

Strategic Agenda  
King County Superior Court  
2009 – 2014

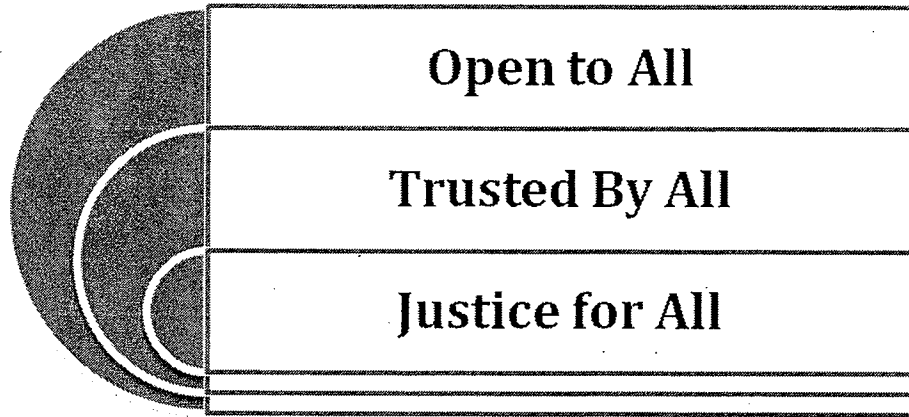
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## MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the King County Superior Court is to serve the public by ensuring justice through accessible and effective forums for the fair, understandable, and timely resolution of legal matters.

## **VISION**



King County Superior Court is dedicated to the highest quality justice while being innovative, efficient and responsive to the changing needs of our diverse community.

## VALUES

**Professional**

- The court and its employees must conduct business with competence, expertise and civility toward those we serve in a way that ensures justice is done (both in appearance and in fact). Clear and respectful communication, internally and externally, fosters an environment of service and collegiality.

**Culturally  
Competent**

- The court and its employees must be familiar with diverse backgrounds and cultures in order to respectfully promote full access to justice for all people.

**Accessible**

- The court and its employees must function in a way that ensures access to our court is available to all. Our facilities should be physically accessible, our processes and procedures understandable, and resources should be provided for addressing language barriers.

**Service-Oriented**

- Effective service is more than customer relations. Our staff is committed to the high calling of serving the public, and conducting the work of the court in an efficient manner. The court and its employees must emphasize excellent service.

**Solution  
Oriented**

- Everyone associated with the court must recognize the importance of their role in dispute resolution and solving problems for those who come to the court. We must always think in terms of justice-related outcomes.

**Fair,  
Understandable,  
and Timely**

- Our decisions, whether judicial or administrative, must be fair, understandable and timely.

## **Safe and Secure**

- The court will provide a safe and secure environment.

## **Leadership**

- The court will model vision and leadership in all areas of the organization.

The following critical issues face our court and are not listed in order of importance:

## **Issue One: Access**

Court services must be available to all members of our community. Differences such as culture, economic status, geographic area of residence, language and physical traits can serve as barriers to justice. The Court must identify and eliminate barriers to access, assist personnel in understanding persons with different needs, and provide appropriate information and services to ensure accessibility.

**Goal: King County Superior Court will promote access to justice for all persons.**

### **Strategies:**

1. Regularly review court processes and services to identify and eliminate barriers to access.
2. Enhance access through various means, using technology, personnel, and printed materials.
3. Conduct periodic training to ensure that judicial officers and court personnel understand the needs of persons who face potential access barriers.
4. Provide court forms and written materials that use plain language, are understandable to those representing themselves, and are available in multiple languages.
5. Ensure continued provision of excellent interpreter services.
6. Eliminate barriers that impede access to the court's facilities and services for those with physical or mental/cognitive limitations.
7. Establish and regularly monitor performance measures designed to gauge accessibility of court facilities and services. Include mechanisms to elicit court customer input.

## **Issue Two: Case Management**

The Court must resolve cases in a timely manner and avoid undue delay. Performance standards, case prioritization and resource allocation, effective case scheduling, alternative dispute resolution, process improvement techniques and use of best practices all contribute to the fair and timely resolution of cases. The effective administration of justice requires a careful balancing of the goals of fairness and timeliness. Efficiency must be balanced with the Court's mandate to provide just and fair resolution of cases.

**Goal: The Superior Court will manage cases to resolve them in a fair, understandable and timely manner.**

### **Strategies:**

1. Review and implement, as appropriate, the recommendations of the Justice Management Institute (JMI) study on criminal case management.
2. Review and implement, as appropriate, the Operational Master Plan (OMP) for Child and Family cases.
3. Ensure efficient civil case management, and implement as appropriate systems to address evolving case management requirements.
4. Maximize use of judicial officers by evaluating assignment of cases.
5. Evaluate and develop technology to maximize efficient case management.
6. Review and change as necessary local court rules and internal operating practices to maximize efficient case management and provide clarity to litigants.
7. Evaluate calendars and court hearings to maximize efficient case management.
8. Enforce and clarify case assignment policies.
9. Respond to concerns of the bar regarding case management procedures and processes.
10. Implement performance measures as appropriate to maximize efficient case management.

## **Issue Three: Problem-Solving Courts**

In recent years, our Court has focused on approaches that have been tested and proved promising in achieving more effective outcomes for court participants and to avoid the revolving door that results from failing to intervene effectively with drug addicted and mentally ill offenders. These approaches stress a collaborative, multidisciplinary problem-solving approach to addressing the underlying problems as well as the legal issues that bring these individuals into court. Juvenile Court serves as a model for providing effective programs and services to youth and families involved in the juvenile justice system.

The Court also focuses on judicial approaches that target the early resolution of cases involving families and children.

**Goal: Adopt approaches, processes, and evidence-based therapeutic strategies that enhance individual and public outcomes to resolve cases involving treatment needs and difficult family issues.**

### **Strategies:**

1. Integrate a judicial therapeutic approach into Drug Court and Family Treatment Court.
2. Promote early and long-term resolution of cases involving families and children.
3. Continue to adopt and implement evidence-based outcomes and regularly monitor performance measures in these courts. Re-evaluate best practices based upon data.
4. Provide judicial support and leadership for therapeutic alternatives.
5. Provide effective monitoring and oversight of guardianships and cases involving vulnerable adults.
6. Consider legislative changes regarding appropriate forums for resolution of anti-harassment cases.
7. Provide sufficient and continuous judicial training on new developments in problem-solving courts and methods for resolution.



## **Issue Four: Funding**

The Court needs sufficient funding to perform effectively its constitutional functions. Inadequate funding is reflected in staff shortages and morale problems, substandard facilities, limited research materials, outdated equipment and inadequate supplies. These shortages and problems directly affect the quality of justice. Determining sufficient funding requires careful examination of current base operations and the Court's changing operational needs. To answer these questions, it may be helpful to use outside resources such as the National Center for State Courts or other trend-setting metropolitan courts. The focus of the Court's external inquiry should be on what is missing from this Court's current operations and what can be done to address most effectively identified deficiencies. This effort requires analysis of critical funding needs and "best practices" analysis and a determination of the resources necessary to fund a court committed to excellence.

**Goal: The Court, as an equal branch of government, will advocate the full funding of court operations.**

### **Strategies:**

1. Research and establish the "best practices" in general jurisdiction trial courts nationwide regarding staffing, equipment, resources and facilities, and determine which should be adopted by the Court.
2. Adopt the budget prioritization criteria used in the zero-based budget process to guide the funding strategies.
3. Determine the cost of both current operations and the adopted "best practices" model as applicable to the Court.
4. Consider the financial challenges of King County, including its ability to sustain adequate and predictable general fund revenues; assess the ability and likelihood of increasing state revenues and analyze which court functions and programs are the most likely recipients of any increase in state funds; and, consider which other sources of revenues may be available.
5. Involve the entire Superior Court bench in explaining and advocating for sufficient court funding sources.
6. Identify the key constituencies and individual champions who will assist the court in developing the political support necessary to persuade elected officials in the legislative and executive branches to provide sufficient and stable court funding.
7. Maintain a flexible approach to court funding.

## **Issue Five: Facilities and Security**

Court facilities must support safe and efficient operations and command respect for the independence and importance of the judicial branch. Court facilities are a direct contributor to public perceptions of trust and confidence in the institution. Courthouse facilities directly impacts the Court's ability to achieve justice. The facility itself can directly affect access to justice.

**Goal: All courthouse facilities must be safe, secure and operationally effective.**

### **Strategies:**

1. Develop a master space plan to guide planning and allocation of court operations and future needs.
2. Work with the county facilities department to develop a Facilities Master Plan (FMP) using the Court's planning document. The FMP must consider ways to make court facilities accessible to all users, with input from its users.
3. Establish a high-security courtroom at all court facilities.
4. Develop facility plans that provide on-site services to facilitate compliance with court orders.
5. Keep all court facilities clean and adequately maintained.
6. Ensure that court facilities are accessible to persons with disabilities.
7. Establish adequate facility infrastructure systems (HVAC, electrical, plumbing data and communications, etc.).
8. Provide adequate signage in multiple languages.
9. Promote cross-court and community communication and coordination regarding space needs.
10. Advocate for adequate security-related funding.
11. Ensure comprehensive courthouse security both within the courthouse and from the perimeter.
12. Actively work to promote sufficient public access to court facilities and programs via public transportation.
13. Consider court user needs in facility siting processes.

## **Issue Six: Technology**

Technology is necessary to foster the efficient and open operations. It is critical that the Court have accessible and reliable technology that assures accurate exchange of information in a timely manner, facilitates communication, develops and maintains an accurate record and assists the functioning of the departments of the Court, and promotes access to the Court by all users.

**Goal: Use technology to advance operating efficiency, access to justice, judicial decision-making and open communication.**

### **Strategies:**

1. Assess and prioritize the business needs of the Court and court users. Determine appropriate technology solutions and develop an action plan, including funding options that reduces redundant data entry and engage our partners appropriately.
2. Educate users to maximize capabilities of judges, staff and customers.
3. Define the Court's role in intergovernmental technologies.
4. Evaluate and develop technology to assist in efficient case management.
5. Utilize technology to enhance customer information and service.
6. Establish and regularly monitor performance measures designed to effect savings and efficiencies achieved through technology.

## **Issue Seven: Governance**

Courts are complex organizations. They defy traditional organizational models in both structure and processes. Effective courts require effective governance. Methods that worked in the past may not be suited for present and future court governance. The court must determine how best to make governance decisions by defining the boundary between policy and operating procedure; by deciding how much authority to delegate and to whom; and by balancing individual judicial independence with the inevitable interdependencies of court functions. Ultimately, the Court must ensure that all judges have a voice in court policy making without sacrificing effective governance of the whole court organization.

**Goal: Develop a governance structure and process that will move the court as one toward common goals, inclusive of court staff and all constituencies.**

### **Strategies:**

1. Motivate judges, commissioners and court staff to recognize the value of strategic management.
2. Use strategic management to establish and implement annual goals with agreed-upon measures for evaluation of effectiveness.
3. Ensure that all judges have a voice in developing a model for governance.
4. Use strategic management to prioritize executive committee meeting time.
5. Establish a "succession" plan for the Presiding Judge position.
6. Review and use, as appropriate, the Zero Rules.
7. Define appropriate forums for decision-making.
8. Discuss and decide issues relating to administrative discretion and authority.
9. Foster leadership training.
10. Determine and assign follow-up actions to department chiefs, judge committees and staff.
11. Establish follow-up schedules for completion of all work.
12. Complete policy manual and maintain its currency.

