

2024 OPERATIONAL PLAN MICHIGAN JUDICIAL COUNCIL

Companion document to the 2022 – 2025 Strategic Agenda

November 2023



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MISSION

Michigan's One Court of Justice delivers justice for all by providing access, protecting rights, resolving disputes, and applying the law under the Constitution.

VISION

Michigan's Judicial System is accessible to all and trusted by all.

CORE VALUES

- ❖ **Independent:** remain free from external influences, pressures, and control.
- ❖ **Timely:** resolve legal matters and disputes in an efficient and effective manner.
- ❖ **Fair:** be impartial and free of bias in our actions, procedures, decisions, and treatment of all.
- ❖ **Responsive:** implement innovations and improvements to meet the diverse and evolving needs of court users.
- ❖ **Consistent:** provide court users with similar experiences and the highest quality of services across courts in Michigan.
- ❖ **Compassionate:** be caring, understanding, and professional in all we do.
- ❖ **Collaborative:** provide leadership in engaging with court users, justice system partners, and courts.
- ❖ **Accountable:** be responsible and answerable for our conduct and performance and be transparent in the use of public resources.

Strategic Goals, Strategies, and 2024 Strategic Initiatives

Strategic Goal 1: Court Funding and Technology Infrastructure

Overview: Michigan trial courts are funded from a combination of state and local contributions that has proven to be complex and inadequate. Reforming trial court funding will help provide consistent funding across all Michigan trial courts while addressing real and perceived conflicts of interest placed on courts to between being the impartial forum for the delivery of justice and generating revenue. Restructuring the funding relationship between state and local governments will allow for improved equal access as well as provide opportunities for advancing enhancements to the courts' technology infrastructure.

In 2022 and 2023 the State Court Administrative Office worked in partnership with the executive and legislative branches to secure funding for statewide expansion of the Judicial Information Systems case management system. This is a first and important step toward providing Michigan's trial courts with a unified technology system that will improve data gathering and reporting, provide consistency, and allow for integration with other justice system partners. Having a unified technology system places Michigan's trial courts in a position to cohesively navigate the ever-changing technological demands being placed on courts, leading to improved access to justice and better outcomes for Michigan court users.

STRATEGIES FOR MAKING IMPROVEMENTS:

Court Funding:

- a. Design and recommend a new approach to trial court funding.
- b. Educate about the current problems with trial court funding system and needs for the future.
- c. Collaborate with legislative and executive branch leaders to create and implement a viable approach to trial court funding.
- d. Build internal and external support for implementing a new trial court funding model in Michigan.

Unified Technology Infrastructure

- a. Fund a statewide technology infrastructure (e.g., hardware, software/applications, and data improvements) that meets security and other requirements/specifications using existing and new funding (i.e., American Recovery Plan).
- b. Develop and implement a uniform statewide data structure and uniform data collection methods and reporting to guide decision-making as part of the statewide technology infrastructure.

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- c. Educate about and build support for a unified technology infrastructure among judicial officers, employees, local funding units/leaders, and others.
 - d. Identify and mobilize a wide range of champions to advocate for change.
 - e. Develop a strategy to achieve uniformity/consistency when transitioning to the technology infrastructure.
 - f. Improve and expand IT education and support to courts across the state.

Below are the 2024 Strategic Initiatives.

STRATEGIC GOAL 1: COURT FUNDING AND TECHNOLOGY INFRASTRUCTURE			
2024 Strategic Initiatives	Alignment with Strategies (See Above)	Deliverables	Group Responsible
Alternative Funding for Trial Courts (cont.) Description: The current method of funding courts across Michigan is complex, inadequate, and inequitable. Sufficient, stable, and consistent funding is needed for courts in Michigan to meet the needs of the public and provide the highest quality of justice to all who access and use the court system. Collaboration between the judicial, executive, and legislative branches is essential to addressing the challenges courts are facing as a result of current legislation that will expire in 2024.	Court funding a, b, c	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with the National Center for State Courts and the SCAO to develop a framework for the Court Operating Resources Report (CORR) to standardize the determination of trial court operating costs (includes staffing). • Develop a formula for the standardization of costs and assessments imposed on trial court users. • Work with the MI Department of Treasury (Treasury) to develop a roadmap/blueprint for a centralized trial court collections program operated by Treasury in cooperation with the trial courts. 	MJC Work Group

STRATEGIC GOAL 1: COURT FUNDING AND TECHNOLOGY INFRASTRUCTURE			
2024 Strategic Initiatives	Alignment with Strategies (See Above)	Deliverables	Group Responsible
<p>Generative Artificial Intelligence (Gen AI) and the Courts</p> <p>Description: The application of Gen AI to the practice of law and delivery of justice are emerging and important issues facing the judiciary, as Gen AI models are already being used and are evolving at a rapid pace.</p> <p>It is critical that leaders in the judiciary have the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively engage in conversations about GenAI. Education on understanding the uses of GenAI and its implications on the justice system, are a crucial component of the judiciary's adoption of this rapidly evolving technology across Michigan courts.</p> <p>The use of GenAI has the potential to remarkably change the delivery and administration of justice in the future. The identification of strategic applications for the use of AI is needed to ensure AI is leveraged in an intentional and thoughtful way that best serves the public and the courts.</p>	Unified Technology Infrastructure c, d, f	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Study and identify strategic opportunities and potential impacts of Gen AI on the judiciary. Study and develop training and education opportunities for building statewide knowledge of Gen AI and its applications among judicial officers, administrators, and court employees. 	MJC Work Group

Strategic Goal #2: The Public's Experience & Effective Problem Resolution

Overview: A justice system that is accessible to all and easy to navigate is a high priority for the judicial branch. Michigan's trial courts are committed to improving the experience of the public by expanding effective dispute resolution practices across all case types. Changing the courts' response to behavioral health concerns and connecting court users to services needed at earlier stages of involvement with the justice system will lead to better individual outcomes. Expanding the use of existing evidence-based practices and emerging technologies to enhance access and provide effective problem resolution to court users will improve the public's experience and build trust and awareness across the judiciary.

STRATEGIES FOR MAKING IMPROVEMENTS:

Improve the Public's Experience:

- a. Make the courts more understandable and user friendly for all who use the courts.
- b. Enhance/expand educational and other resources (e.g., information, technology, personal assistance) available to court users so they are able to access and conduct business successfully with courts in-person and virtually.
- c. Use existing and emerging technologies to enhance access to services, court and case information, and the ability to conduct business with the courts remotely/virtually, etc.
- d. Improve websites and enhance dissemination of information using a variety of media and platforms to reach all court users.
- e. Implement regulatory and other policy changes that will allow for an expansion of legal and non-legal assistance to court users (all types of cases) (e.g., implement regulatory reform).
- f. Ensure courts across the state have access to a wide range of services and programs that meet the needs of court users.

Provide More Effective Problem Resolution

- a. Implement operational efficiencies through technology and simplify court procedures.
- b. Increase consistency in staffing levels, resources, procedures, and scheduling.
- c. Expand the use of case management practices that help resolve cases expeditiously.

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- d. Develop a comprehensive continuum of court and community services to effectively address mental/behavioral health and substance abuse and addiction issues.
 - e. Establish methods for collaborating and providing needed services (e.g., housing, education, mental health, substance abuse and addiction, rehabilitation) across justice and social service systems.
 - f. Collaborate with partners to expand the availability of justice and community resources across the state, particularly in rural areas.
 - g. Continue to expand uses of alternative dispute resolution methods and options (e.g., mediation, online dispute resolution, etc.).
 - h. Be a leader in implementing justice and judicial system reforms consistent with the recommendations of Michigan's Task Forces and Commissions and other national leaders and studies.

Below are the 2024 Strategic Initiatives.

STRATEGIC GOAL 2: THE PUBLIC'S EXPERIENCE & EFFECTIVE PROBLEM RESOLUTION			
2024 Strategic Initiatives	Alignment with Strategies (See Above)	Deliverables	Group Responsible
Behavioral Health Improvements (cont.) Description: Behavioral health issues continue to be a key factor for many individuals involved with the justice system across all case types. Expanding on existing practices in addition to identifying new strategies for early intervention and diversion, for both adults and juveniles with behavioral health issues is critical. By increasing the use of early intervention practices, courts will be able to provide more effective problem solving leading to better outcomes for Michigan's court users and improving the public's experience.	Improve the Public's Experience e, f Provide More Effective Problem Resolution d, e, f, h	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Study and recommend best practices for judicial leadership on the use of the sequential intercept model within the community to address behavioral health needs within and outside of the justice system. Develop a strategy to implement effective statewide education to judiciary, court staff, CMH, and other community players about AOT. 	MJC Work Group

STRATEGIC GOAL 2: THE PUBLIC'S EXPERIENCE & EFFECTIVE PROBLEM RESOLUTION			
2024 Strategic Initiatives	Alignment with Strategies (See Above)	Deliverables	Group Responsible
<p>Expand Problem Resolution Approaches to Improve Justice</p> <p>Description: Traditional approaches place courts in a position to resolve cases, rather than address underlying problems. Problem-resolution approaches make use of innovative strategies to address the underlying conditions that bring people into contact with the legal system. Problem Solving Courts have provided effective resolutions for a small percentage of cases, and Michigan continues to be a leader in alternative dispute resolution and the use of mediation.</p> <p>New approaches for both civil and criminal case types may lead to more effective problem resolution and eliminate the revolving door for some individuals. Responding to complicated social issues and providing justice at the individual case level, will lead to better individual outcomes.</p>	<p>Improve the Public's Experience a, e, f</p> <p>Provide More Effective Problem Resolution e, h</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Determine types of cases and the points within a case where problem resolution strategies could be employed or should not be employed and recommend best practices. Identify specific areas of training and strategies to help build capacity for courts to implement problem resolution thinking and approaches. 	MJC Work Group

Strategic Goal #3: Racial and Social Equity

Overview: The judicial branch is committed to providing a system that is free from bias, equitable, consistent, and predictable. Studies continue to show large disparities in arrests, sentencing, and incarceration rates between white people and people of color. It remains a priority of the judiciary to ensure that all court users, including disenfranchised and marginalized groups, have similar experiences throughout their involvement with the judicial system. The judicial branch will continue to work to implement practices, expand education, and analyze data to eliminate disparate treatment and ensure that all who interact with the judicial system have an experience that is equitable and are treated with dignity and respect.

STRATEGIES FOR MAKING IMPROVEMENTS:

- a. Identify and study practices that may, or are known to, result in disparate treatment and share data to understand and educate about the magnitude and impacts of these practices.
- b. Eliminate practices that disadvantage specific groups and/or result in disparate treatment and outcomes; implement new practices that are just and equitable for all.
- c. Continue to improve and expand trainings and educational opportunities for judicial branch employees.
- d. Build trust with all people, especially people of color and disenfranchised and marginalized groups, in collaboration with justice system and community partners.
- e. Promote/advocate for diversity in justice system leaders, including judicial officers, prosecutors, law enforcement, etc. to ensure leaders and employees reflect the diversity in the communities they serve.
- f. Normalize conversations about racial and social equity across the judicial branch, with justice system and community partners, and within communities.
- g. Lead efforts to increase equity, consistency, and predictability within and across courts and with external partners.
- h. Implement consistent and predictable processes across all courts.

Below are the 2024 Strategic Initiatives.

STRATEGIC GOAL 3: RACIAL & SOCIAL EQUITY			
2024 Strategic Initiatives	Alignment with Strategies (See Above)	Deliverables	Group Responsible
Establish a liaison relationship with the DEI Commission Description: The judicial branch continues to work to eliminate racial and social inequities across the justice system. In 2022 the Michigan Supreme Court established the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Commission to work towards elimination of demographic and other disparities within the judiciary. The MJC values the work of the DEI Commission and continues to recognize the need for collaboration while avoiding duplication of efforts. Fostering a partnership between the MJC and DEI Commission will help to ensure that all individuals experience a justice system that is free from bias, equitable, consistent, and fair.	d, e, f, g	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The MJC will establish a liaison relationship with the DEI Commission, as it has with the Justice for All Commission, to address racial and social inequities across the justice system. Members of the MJC will continue to communicate with the DEI Commission to ensure that both body's priorities are aligned and represented in the work being advanced. The MJC will receive updates on the work/progress of the DEI commission and provide updates to the DEI Commission on the work/progress of the MJC. 	MJC to defer to the work of the DEI Commission MJC Established DEI Liaison Relationship

Strategic Goal #4: Public Trust and Understanding

Overview: Addressing the decline of public trust in government institutions, including the judicial branch, continues to be a priority for the judiciary. By remaining independent, fair, and impartial; while protecting rights, enhancing access, and providing transparency, Michigan's trial courts are working to deliver justice that is trusted by all. The judicial branch will work to continue to build partnerships and enhance collaboration with the public, by providing education and identifying strategies for system wide improvements to continue to increase public trust and understanding.

STRATEGIES FOR MAKING IMPROVEMENTS:

- a. Expand public outreach and education to promote confidence in the judicial branch, and educate about civics, democracy, the rule of law, and court procedures and practices.
- b. Collaborate with justice system and community partners to educate about and build trust and confidence in the judicial branch.
- c. Build upon and strengthen court performance metrics and reporting (e.g., public dashboard, etc.).
- d. Increase transparency while also protecting the privacy of court participants.
- e. Continue to improve and expand training and educational opportunities for the judiciary and court employees on professionalism, civility, ethics, etc.
- f. Continually solicit and listen to public/court user feedback.
- g. Demonstrate neutrality/non-partisanship and remain independent/free from bias and impropriety as judicial officers and employees carry out their sworn and professional duties.

Below are the 2024 Strategic Initiatives.

STRATEGIC GOAL 4: PUBLIC TRUST AND UNDERSTANDING			
2024 Strategic Initiatives	Alignment with Strategies (See Above)	Deliverables	Group Responsible
Expanding Civic Education Description: Public understanding of the role and operation of the judicial branch of government is critical to maintaining and building trust in the judiciary. The judicial branch can help to build public trust and understanding by collaborating with schools, community colleges, and universities to provide expand civic education.	a, b	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluate training and public education resources currently used and identify opportunities for expansion and improvement. Recommend future opportunities, partnerships, and best practices for reaching marginalized and underserved communities. 	MJC Work Group

Strategic Goal #5: Workforce Excellence

Overview: The judicial branch continues to strive to ensure that Michigan trial courts employ a workforce that is professional, skilled, and diverse. In recent years Michigan's trial courts have faced workforce related challenges that mirror those of other industries nation-wide. Emerging technologies and recent social and justice reforms have drastically changed court operations and the demands placed on judicial officers, court administrators, and employees alike. It remains a priority for the judicial branch to ensure that Michigan's trial court employees possess the knowledge and skills necessary to perform at the highest levels, reflect the diversity in the communities they serve, and embrace and adhere to the highest ethical standards. The judicial branch will continue to work to maintain these high standards to ensure that courts are able to continue to recruit, hire, and retain a workforce that reflects the values of the branch and the communities they serve.

STRATEGIES FOR MAKING IMPROVEMENTS:

- a. Promote and improve diversity, equity, and inclusion/belonging throughout the court system – judicial officers and administrators.
- b. Collaborate with legal and education partners (e.g., law schools, associations, schools) to demonstrate paths for becoming a judicial officer and encourage careers at courts (e.g., administrative, direct client services, etc.)
- c. Advocate for/provide competitive compensation for court employees – pay, benefits, and incentives.
- d. Continue to improve and expand training and educational programs for judicial officers, administrators, and supervisors on workplace issues (e.g., DEI, implicit bias, well-being/self-care, leadership, management, secondary trauma, etc.) and expand training to all employees.
- e. Promote best human resource practices and expand support to courts on human resource issues.
- f. Develop existing and the next generation of judicial and administrative leaders.
- g. Improve and expand implementation of best/promising practices that strengthen court culture and improve employee well-being.
- h. Implement practices that ensure equitable opportunities for all, especially people of color and marginalized groups; discontinue practices that disadvantage some groups (e.g., hiring, pay, promotions).

Below are the 2024 Strategic Initiatives.

STRATEGIC GOAL 5: WORKFORCE EXCELLENCE			
2024 Strategic Initiatives	Alignment with Strategies (See Above)	Deliverables	Group Responsible
Workforce of Today and Tomorrow (cont.) Description: The judicial branch remains committed to addressing concerns faced by the current workforce while preparing courts to address the anticipated demands of the workforce of the future. Understanding the skills necessary to effectively and efficiently serve the public while maintaining a positive work environment that addresses the needs of its employees and promotes inclusion is essential to ensuring the successful operation of the judiciary.	c, e, f, g, h	Complete further analysis of the court employee survey results and engage court administrators to better understand the judiciary's current work force challenges and make recommendations for preparing courts for a workforce of the future, which may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategies for attracting and retaining a highly qualified workforce, including sharing pay and benefit information among the trial courts. Reimagining, redesigning, and redefining traditional court jobs. Identifying the skills needed to do the jobs based on changing needs, expectations, and service demands in order to upskill/reskill judicial officers and court employees. 	MJC Work Group