



MINNESOTA  
JUDICIAL  
BRANCH

# Priorities & Strategies for Minnesota's Judicial Branch

## *Focus on the Future*

FY2018-FY2019

Minnesota Judicial Council

*(This page is intentionally left blank.)*





## Letter from the Chief Justice

Dear Fellow Minnesotans:

Minnesota's courts have a national reputation for professionalism, efficiency, and innovation. They have earned this reputation by taking seriously the need to periodically assess judicial branch performance and identify new and innovative ways of more effectively handling cases and delivering quality services as cost efficiently as possible. This document is the result of our most recent self-assessment.

The Minnesota Judicial Branch has undergone many changes over the last decade, with the goal of improving our ability to fulfill our core mission: *To provide justice through a system that assures equal access for the fair and timely resolution of cases and controversies.* The Branch has worked to reduce administrative costs, increase our efficiency and make use of new information technologies to improve service to court users, streamline our work, and reduce operational costs.

We remain committed to providing excellent service, more efficient operations and more effective use of judicial resources in the years ahead. But we will need the support of our partners in the Executive and Legislative Branches, along with our justice system partners and the citizens of this state, to sustain this commitment to improvement during these current difficult economic times.

Our new plan is the result of many months of study by the Judicial Council's ad hoc Strategic Planning Committee. The result is a set of goals and priorities designed to produce a more efficient, effective, and equitable court system. It is our blueprint for the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lorie S. Gildea".

Lorie S. Gildea  
Chief Justice



---

## 2018-2019 Judicial Council Membership

Hon. Lorie S. Gildea (Chair)  
*Chief Justice, Supreme Court*

Hon. Ivy Bernhardson  
*Chief Judge, Fourth District*

Hon. Krista Martin  
*Judge, Tenth District*

Hon. G. Barry Anderson  
*Associate Justice, Supreme Court*

Hon. Jeannice Reding  
*Judge, Fourth District*

Jeffrey G. Shorba  
*State Court Administrator*

Hon. Edward Cleary  
*Chief Judge, Court of Appeals*

Hon. Michelle Dietrich  
*Chief Judge, Fifth District*

Dawn Torgerson  
*Deputy State Court Administrator*

Hon. James Florey  
*Judge, Court of Appeals*

Hon. Sally Tarnowski  
*Chief Judge, Sixth District*

Heather Kendall  
*District Administrator, Second District*

Hon. Kathryn Messerich  
*Chief Judge, First District*

Hon. Jay Carlson  
*Chief Judge, Seventh District*

Marieta Johnson  
*District Administrator, Sixth District*

Hon. Kevin Mark  
*Judge, First District*

Hon. Michael Thompson  
*Chief Judge, Eighth District*

Tim Ostby  
*District Administrator, Seventh & Eighth Districts*

Hon. Thomas Pugh  
*Judge, First District*

Hon. Paul Benschhoof  
*Chief Judge, Ninth District*

Karen Messner  
*Court Administrator, McLeod and Sibley Counties*

Hon. John Guthmann  
*Chief Judge, Second District*

Hon. Douglas Meslow  
*Chief Judge, Tenth District*

Hon. Jodi Williamson  
*Chief Judge, Third District*

Hon. Sheri Schluchter (Vice Chair)  
*Judge, Ninth District*



## Introduction

Development of the FY18-19 Strategic Plan began in March 2016. A Strategic Planning Workgroup, established by the Chief Justice, reviewed the FY16-17 Strategic Plan with the goal of forming recommendations for the FY18-19 Plan. The Workgroup reviewed initiatives contained in the FY16-17 Plan to determine whether these initiatives would be completed by the end of the FY17 biennium and whether any of the initiatives should be continued as strategic initiatives in the FY18-19 Plan. Workgroup deliberations relied heavily on the results of a Judicial Council Visioning Session, aimed at identifying what the Judicial Branch will look like in the Year 2026. The seven topics discussed at the visioning session included:

1. Where will court facilities be located and what services will be provided at those facilities?
2. How will technology be used to provide services?
3. What services will be provided to self-represented litigants and vulnerable populations?
4. What types and where will drug courts be located and how will they be funded?
5. What support services and staff will be available to judges?
6. How will courts create and maintain the record?
7. How will we educate and train judges and staff?

The Strategic Planning Workgroup presented a draft Plan to the Judicial Council in July 2016. The draft Plan was taken under advisement by the Judicial Council pending completion of the 2017 Legislative Session. The Plan was subsequently adopted by the Judicial Council in August 2017.

The FY18-19 Strategic Plan sets out the Judicial Branch's blueprint for the future with three overarching goals of improving access to justice, providing effective administration of justice and strengthening public trust and accountability.



---

## **Judicial Branch Vision, Mission, and Core Values**

The elements of this strategic plan are designed to support the mission, vision, and core values of the Minnesota Judicial Branch:

### **Vision**

The general public and those who use the court system will refer to it as accessible, fair, consistent, responsive, free of discrimination, independent, and well-managed.

### **Mission**

To provide justice through a system that assures equal access for the fair and timely resolution of cases and controversies.

### **Core Values**

Core values that the judicial system must embrace if it is to perform successfully its unique role in society:

- Equal Justice for All
- Public Trust and Confidence
- Innovative
- Collaborative



## STRATEGIC GOAL 1: ACCESS TO JUSTICE

*A justice system that is open, affordable, understandable, and provides appropriate levels of service to all users*

### ISSUE

Ensuring access to justice for all citizens is an enduring concern for the Minnesota Judicial Branch. It is also an increasingly challenging one, as the needs of litigants become more complex, greater numbers of litigants are unrepresented, and courthouse safety and access concerns persist.

### ACCESS PRIORITIES

The Access to Justice Priorities focus on the need to continue efforts to build on the technological momentum and expertise in the state, the need to improve resources provided to unrepresented litigants and vulnerable populations, and the need to provide the citizens of this state with safe and secure access to courthouses. The Priorities also focus on the need to develop and maintain an information security effort that will mitigate Judicial Branch risk of major data breaches, data corruption, system outages, document/data loss, and cyber-attacks.

The goals are to expand the capacity of the Judicial Branch to efficiently and effectively process cases, provide court users and public employees with a safe and secure environment, and to strengthen the security of

the Judicial Branch technology infrastructure and the private data contained therein.

The two Access to Justice priorities and corresponding initiatives are::

**Priority 1A:** Modify access and service delivery levels in the context of limited state resources, technology developments, demographics, and business process changes.

- ⇒ Explore greater and other uses of technology to deliver services, e.g. expanded use of ITV, court kiosks.
- ⇒ Explore sharing work across county and district lines.
- ⇒ Strive to produce a consistent customer service experience throughout the state.
- ⇒ Encourage and work with justice partners to insure greater use of cross-county collaborations to process cases.
- ⇒ Continue efforts to identify, secure funding for, and implement courthouse security measures.
- ⇒ Implement post-eCourtMN initiatives in the trial and appellate courts.
- ⇒ Continue implementation of cyber security improvements.





---

## STRATEGIC GOAL 1: ACCESS TO JUSTICE

*A justice system that is open, affordable, understandable,  
and provides appropriate levels of service to all users*

---

**Priority 1B:** Provide resources to improve accessibility to the courts for self-represented litigants, vulnerable adults and persons handicapped in communications.

- ⇒ Develop simplified forms, instructions, orders and other materials.
  
- ⇒ Explore ways to promote access to pro bono services.
  
- ⇒ Continue participation in the Minnesota Working Inter-disciplinary Network of Guardianship Stakeholders (WINGS) activities.
  
- ⇒ Continue efforts to ensure persons who are handicapped in communication have full access to the courts.



---

## STRATEGIC GOAL 2: EFFECTIVE ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE

*A justice system that adopts approaches and processes for the resolution of cases aimed at providing just and fair outcomes.*

### ISSUE

Over the last two decades, Minnesota courts have worked diligently to become increasingly efficient. Yet, efficiency is not an adequate measure of a successful justice system. Striving for more effective outcomes for court participants is the focus of this goal.

### EFFECTIVE ADMINISTRATION PRIORITIES

In 2007 the Judicial Council established court performance goals and a process for monitoring progress toward meeting those goals. Performance goals are necessary to ensure accountability of the judicial branch, improve overall operations of the court, and enhance the public's trust and confidence in the judiciary.

Effective outcomes for litigants are also dependent on judges having the information and support systems in place to process cases in an effective and timely manner.

In recent years, new strategies have been tested and proven promising in achieving more effective outcomes for court participants who continually come back into the justice system because underlying substance abuse, mental

health, or other psychosocial problems have not been addressed. These approaches stress a collaborative, multidisciplinary problem solving approach for addressing the underlying problems as well as the legal issues that bring these individuals into court in the first place.

The two Effective Administration priorities and corresponding initiatives are:

**Priority 2A.** Explore cost effective and efficient ways to create and maintain the court record.

- ⇒ Ensure judicial branch control of the court record.
- ⇒ Examine if changes should be made in the manner in which transcripts are created.
- ⇒ Develop priorities for which court proceedings should be created by an in-person and/or real-time court reporter and those to be created through digital recording.

**Priority 2B:** Continue Judicial Branch support for Treatment Courts.

- ⇒ Pursue stable, statewide funding.
- ⇒ Promote statewide accessibility.



## STRATEGIC GOAL 3: PUBLIC TRUST AND CONFIDENCE

*A justice system that engenders public trust and confidence through impartial decision-making and accountability for the use of public resources.*

### Issue

The Judicial Branch must be accountable to the public. An overwhelming majority of Minnesotans have confidence in the state's judicial branch as an institution. Minnesotans believe judges are well-equipped to do their jobs and that court employees are helpful and courteous.

### PUBLIC TRUST AND CONFIDENCE PRIORITIES

The public trust and confidence priorities focus on the need to continue efforts to assess and improve court operations and performance, to ensure that judges and staff at all levels are competent, professional and customer service oriented, and to enhance the public's trust and confidence in the judiciary.

The three Public Trust and Confidence priorities and corresponding initiatives are:

**Priority 3A:** Continue efforts to assess and improve court performance and accountability.

⇒ Continue to integrate regular use and review of performance measures reports relating to court management activities.

**Priority 3B:** Collaborate with others in justice system to enhance services to diverse populations.

⇒ Work collaboratively to identify, reduce and eliminate disparities.

⇒ Implement Pretrial Release Initiative recommendations to use evidence based tool(s) for pretrial release decisions statewide.

**Priority 3C:** Continue efforts to ensure a quality court workplace for judges and staff.

⇒ Provide on-going training to judges and court employees, including training on the technology employed by the Judicial Branch.

⇒ Develop support strategies for judges and staff.

⇒ Continue efforts to provide judicial officers and court personnel with the materials, motivation, direction, sense of mission, and commitment to do quality work.

---

*“Next to doing right, the great object in the administration of justice should be to give public satisfaction.”*

*-John Jay, the first United States Chief Justice*



**MINNESOTA  
JUDICIAL  
BRANCH**