



# 2024 – 2027 Strategic Plan

*Planning for the Future of the Courts:  
Taking Performance to the Next Level*

16<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit, Macomb County Probate,  
and 42<sup>nd</sup> Judicial District Courts

March 18, 2024





---

## Table of Contents

(Hover mouse over the section you wish to jump to and hold “control + click”)

Strategic Planning Committee .....	iii
Section 1: Overview .....	1
Section 2: Mission, Vision, and Core Values .....	2
Section 3: Trends Analysis.....	3
Section 4: Strategic Focus Areas (SFAs), Goals, and Strategies .....	4
SFA 1: Service and Operational Excellence.....	5
SFA 2: Technology Advancements.....	6
SFA 3: Infrastructure Expansion and Improvements.....	7
SFA 4: Workforce of the Future .....	8
SFA 5: External Relations and Judicial Branch Independence .....	9
Appendices.....	10
Appendix A: Trends Analysis – Future Positive Scenarios	
Appendix B: 2023 Survey Report – Executive Summary	

Links to:

- External Trends – [https://www.macombgov.org/sites/default/files/files/2024-04/CT\\_20240410\\_StrategicPlan\\_ExternalTrends.pdf](https://www.macombgov.org/sites/default/files/files/2024-04/CT_20240410_StrategicPlan_ExternalTrends.pdf)
- Internal Trends – [https://www.macombgov.org/sites/default/files/files/2024-04/CT\\_20240410\\_StrategicPlan\\_InternalTrends.pdf](https://www.macombgov.org/sites/default/files/files/2024-04/CT_20240410_StrategicPlan_InternalTrends.pdf)
- Strategic Planning Survey Report – Findings – [https://www.macombgov.org/sites/default/files/files/2024-04/CT\\_20240410\\_StrategicPlan\\_SurveyResults.pdf](https://www.macombgov.org/sites/default/files/files/2024-04/CT_20240410_StrategicPlan_SurveyResults.pdf)



This document was developed under grant number SJI-23-T-033. The points of view expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the State Justice Institute.



**16<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit Court  
Macomb County Probate Court  
42<sup>nd</sup> Judicial District Court**

***Circuit Judges:***

JAMES M. BIERNAT, JR., *Chief Judge*  
MATTHEW S. SWITALSKI, *Chief Judge Pro Tem*  
EDWARD A. SERVITTO, JR.  
RICHARD L. CARETTI  
DIANE M. DRUZINSKI  
TRACEY A. YOKICH  
KATHRYN A. VIVIANO  
JENNIFER M. FAUNCE  
JAMES M. MACERONI  
JOSEPH TOIA  
MICHAEL E. SERVITTO  
RACHEL RANCILIO  
JULIE GATTI  
TERI L. DENNINGS  
MATTHEW P. SABAUGH

***Probate Judges:***

SANDRA A. HARRISON  
SARA A. SCHIMKE

***District Judges:***

WILLIAM H. HACKEL, III  
JENNIFER A. ANDARY

***Clerk of the Court:***

ANTHONY FORLINI

***Court Administrator:***

JULIE BOVENSCHEN

January 22, 2024

Dear Colleagues,

In January 2023, following many challenges and changes experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic, we determined the need for developing a strategic plan for the 16th Judicial Circuit, Macomb Probate, and 42nd Judicial District Courts. The goal of the strategic plan is to help the Courts identify its priorities, promote a systematic approach to making changes and improvements, and provide a blueprint for the future.

A committee of volunteer judges and court leadership was formed and responsible for developing a strategic plan. The committee was guided by Dr. Brenda Wagenknecht-Ivey, CEO of PRAXIS Consulting, and spent several months conducting detailed trends analysis. This included surveying court employees and justice system stakeholders, reviewing research on external and internal trends, analyzing the results of the public satisfaction surveys, and determining strengths and weaknesses of our courts.

From these efforts, the committee developed the 2024-2027 Strategic Plan contained in these pages. The Strategic Plan identifies five strategic focus areas which include (1) Service and Operational Excellence, (2) Technology Advancements, (3) Infrastructure Expansion and Improvements, (4) Workforce of the Future, and (5) External Relations and Judicial Branch Independence. These focus areas will assist the Courts with continuous improvements.

In the next stage, the committee moves into the strategic execution phase. The committee has developed meaningful and measurable goals and projects in each strategic focus area to implement over the course of the next year. The Courts are committed to following through with this plan and appreciate the support of the justice community. We know our dedicated judges, leadership, and staff will strive to implement these goals and continue to serve the public by providing a fair, expeditious, and impartial forum for the resolution of matters.

Sincerely,

James M. Biernat, Jr.  
Chief Judge – 16<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit,  
Macomb Probate and 42<sup>nd</sup> District Courts

Julie L. Bovenschen  
Court Administrator

## Strategic Planning Committee

Hon. James Biernat, Chief Judge Assigned Civil/Criminal	Hon. Matthew Switalski, Chief Judge Pro Tem Assigned Family Division
Hon. Julie Gatti, Circuit Court Judge Assigned Civil/Criminal	Hon. James Maceroni, Circuit Court Judge Assigned Civil/Criminal
Hon. Kathy Viviano, Circuit Court Judge Assigned Civil/Criminal	Hon. William Hackel District Court Judge
Hon. Jennifer Andary District Court Judge	Hon. Sara Schimke Probate Court Judge
Julie Bovenschen Court Administrator	Nicole Faulds Juvenile Administrator
John Brennan Probate Court Administrator	Thomas Blohm Friend of Court
Darra Slanec 42-1 District Court Administrator	Karen Grasel 42-2 District Court Administrator
Jean Cloud Deputy Court Administrator	Susan Szabo Court Finance Director
John Kortez Court IT Director	Christina Wohlfield Court Services Director
Katie Brower Case Management Division Manager	David Joseph Juvenile Program Director
Linda Harrison Chief Juvenile Referee	Brian Nicholas Chief FOC Referee
Laura Keeth FOC Enforcement Director	Jacqueline Schultz Legal Services Director - Circuit
Dr. Brenda J. Wagenknecht-Ivey, Consultant CEO, PRAXIS Consulting, Inc.	Valentina Berishaj Clerical Service Director - FOC



---

# 2024 – 2027 Strategic Plan

March 18, 2024

## Section 1: Overview

The 16<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit, Macomb County Probate, and 42<sup>nd</sup> Judicial District Courts (Courts) are pleased to present our 2024 – 2027 Strategic Plan, which will serve as a compass for the coming years. The Plan includes the Courts’ refreshed mission, vision, and core values, identifies five strategic focus areas the Courts will work on in the years ahead, and presents the long-range goals and strategies for improving in those five strategic areas.

The Strategic Plan was developed in 2023 – 2024 by a representative Committee from across the three Courts and with grant and consulting assistance from the State Justice Institute (SJI) and Dr. Brenda Wagenknecht-Ivey of PRAXIS Consulting, Inc. The Committee met regularly over several months. The process included analyzing a myriad of data including internal and external trends and strategic planning survey results. The data helped the Committee understand the likely future environment, identify future opportunities and potential threats, conduct an analysis of strengths and areas for improvement, and think creatively and strategically about future improvements.

The Courts will begin implementing this Strategic Plan in 2024. Each year, committees will work on annual strategic projects in the five strategic focus areas listed below. See the Courts’ Operational Plan for the specific initiatives being worked on each year.





---

## Section 2: Mission, Vision, and Core Values

16<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit, Macomb County Probate, and 42<sup>nd</sup> Judicial District Courts

### MISSION, VISION, AND CORE VALUES

**Mission:** *to serve the public by providing a fair, expeditious, and impartial forum for the resolution of civil, domestic, probate, and criminal matters through the rule of law.*

**Vision:** *to build the public's trust by delivering fair, timely, and effective justice and providing the highest quality of services to the public.*



### Core Values:

- *Honesty and Integrity*
- *Principled decision making – guided by the rule of law and due process*
- *Independence of the judiciary*
- *Impartiality of the tribunal – free from bias and discrimination*
- *Reasonable access to justice – reasonable schedules, promptness, and continuously striving to improve processes*
- *Courtesy and consideration for all*
- *Openness – our processes are open to public scrutiny and critical analysis*
- *Cost effectiveness*



---

## Section 3: Trends Analysis

A trends analysis helps an organization prepare for the future. Understanding the external environment helps the organization anticipate the likely future implications of social, demographic, economic, technological, policy/political, and justice system trends. Analyzing internal trends, including filings, time to disposition, program information, fiscal and human resource data, helps develop an understanding of the internal environment and exposes future needs and opportunities. Lastly, positive future scenarios illustrate how the Courts may respond to and anticipate external and internal trends and present a positive future for the Courts.

Below is a summary of implications of the external trends on the Courts as well as a summary of future needs and opportunities based on the internal trends analysis. Positive future scenarios are included in **Appendix A**.

### External Trends – Summary of Long-Term Implications on the Courts

The Courts will face a myriad of implications because of external trends. A few of the likely future implications are:

- a. A growing and increasingly diverse population in Macomb County.
- b. Changing expectations of the public, court users, and external partners.
- c. Court users who increasingly need and expect assistance (e.g., court services and programs).
- d. Ensuring fair treatment in the court process.
- e. Continued collaboration with external partners.
- f. Increasing expectations for technologically hybrid “everything.”
- g. Societal changes that impact civility, polarization, and the politicization of the Judicial Branch.
- h. Declining trust in government and declining respect for authority.
- i. Growing workforce challenges.
- j. Advances in technology and the need for continued growth and improvements.
- k. Continuing funding/resource challenges.

### Internal Trends – Future Needs and Opportunities

The following future needs and opportunities were identified based on an analysis of internal trends:

- a. Improve and enhance access, services, and programs.
- b. Improve and streamline court processes and procedures to ensure timely and fair resolution of disputes.
- c. Continue to collaborate with partners and stakeholders to enhance services, programs, and operational efficiency.
- d. Work with County partners to enhance court facilities, space, safety, and security.
- e. Continue to strengthen and expand uses of technology to improve access, services, and court operations.
- f. Expand public education and community outreach.
- g. Modernize human resource, management, and workplace practices to attract, retain, and engage the workforce.
- h. Advocate for needed resources and the flexibility to reallocate resources to respond to court goals and the changing needs and expectations of the public and court users.

---

## Section 4: Strategic Focus Areas (SFAs), Goals, and Strategies

Strategic focus areas (SFAs) are issues or topics that are important to the Courts' future success. They are areas of strategic importance. SFAs typically present as either challenges that must be addressed and/or overcome, or opportunities that should be seized.

This section includes a brief description of each SFA and presents the Courts' long-range goals and strategies for making changes and improvements. Long range goals are end targets the Courts are striving to achieve in each of the strategic focus areas. Strategies are the general ways in which the Courts will achieve the goals.

Five key strategic focus areas (SFAs) emerged from the strategic planning process. They are listed below. The Courts will focus on making changes and improvements in these five areas in the next few years. Focusing on these areas is supported by the results of the 2023 strategic planning survey results, which included gathering input from external partners, judges and staff, and court users. [See Appendix B for the Executive Summary of the Survey Results.]



See the Courts' Operational Plan for the specific strategic initiatives or projects being worked on each year.

---

## ***SFA 1: Service and Operational Excellence***

**Description:** Providing, and ensuring access to, the highest quality of services, assistance, and programs for all court users is a high priority for the Courts. This includes enhancing virtual and in-person court services, helping court users navigate and understand the court system, and providing programs that meet court users' needs and achieve effective outcomes.

Operational excellence is also a high priority for the Courts. The Courts are committed to resolving legal matters in a fair, timely, and efficient manner through processes, procedures, and practices that are understandable, consistent, and effective. The Courts look to further these goals by prioritizing scheduling improvements, reducing wait times, and making further improvements to processes and procedures.

The Courts are serving a growing, shifting, and increasingly diverse population. To meet the population's growing and evolving needs, the Courts must enhance and expand services to court users by helping them access, understand, and navigate the Courts. Strengthening self-help, language assistance and information / resources are a few of the Courts' priorities. Effective, evidence-based court and community-based programs for families, youth, and at-risk populations are also needed.

### **Long Range Goals and Strategies**

#### Goal 1: Court users will be able to access and navigate the Courts.

##### Strategies:

- a. Improve and expand resources, services, assistance, and education available onsite and online to court users.
- b. Streamline and standardize procedures and processes; organize and simplify forms making them more usable and understandable to court users.
- c. Train employees to inform court users about court resources, services, and assistance.

#### Goal 2: The Courts will resolve matters and provide services in a timely and efficient manner.

##### Strategies:

- a. Use proven and effective case management practices and technology to improve scheduling, appearance rates, and processing of cases.
- b. Implement practices for remote court proceedings that maintain the respect and integrity for the courts and court proceedings.
- c. Increase communication and coordination between stakeholders, court users, and court employees.

#### Goal 3: The Courts' programs will achieve effective outcomes and meet the needs of all court users.

##### Strategies:

- a. Evaluate and strengthen existing court and community programs for youth, families, and at-risk populations.
- b. Collaborate with community partners to identify and expand programs and services.
- c. Train and educate staff to respond to the program needs of court users.

---

## ***SFA 2: Technology Advancements***

**Description:** Technology is advancing rapidly. The Courts recognize the need to stay at the forefront of new and emerging technological solutions to enhance access, services, and conveniences for court users, improve operational efficiency, and allow for appropriate information/data sharing across courts and with justice system partners. The Courts are committed to being proactive in planning for and using technologies.

Currently the Courts must rely on the County for many IT services. The Courts also have multiple, stand-alone case and document management systems that are not integrated. E-filing has been implemented in some, but not all, of the Courts (e.g., probate, juvenile, and district courts). Making online payments; improving virtual access and services; text message reminders; adding information, resources, live chat, and/or chat bots on the website; adding kiosks in the Courts and communities; and improving technologies in courtrooms are a few of the improvements the Courts want to make in the future. Finally, the Courts will continue to prioritize safeguarding information and protecting against data breaches and cyber threats and attacks.

### **Long Range Goals and Strategies**

Goal 1: The Courts will use new and emerging technologies to enhance access and services and improve operational effectiveness.

Strategies:

- a. Develop a systematic approach to researching new and emerging technologies, while continuing to review and evaluate the effectiveness of existing technology.
- b. Explore, identify and implement new technology solutions to improve services and operational efficiency.
- c. Upgrade, expand and standardize technology resources for court staff and users in all courtrooms.

Goal 2: Court IT will service the Courts' technology needs and provide essential support across all areas of the Courts.

Strategies:

- a. Strengthen and expand the Courts' IT team to improve services and support for the Courts and court users.
- b. Collaborate with County partners to build support for increased capabilities of Court IT services to meet the Courts' needs and increase responsiveness.
- c. Develop and provide ongoing technology training.

Goal 3: The Court will adopt and promote technology that integrates with all court departments and appropriate stakeholders to increase efficiency and effectiveness.

Strategies:

- a. Collaborate and engage with internal departments and external stakeholders to develop and implement a system to share appropriate electronic information, data, and documents.
- b. Increase awareness and educate stakeholders and court users on how to access electronic/online information, resources, and case files.

---

### ***SFA 3: Infrastructure Expansion and Improvements***

**Description:** Preparing now for future infrastructure needs (e.g., adequate courthouse facilities, space, security) is vitally important for the future of the Courts. Working with County partners, the Courts will continue to advocate for court facilities that meet the current and evolving needs of the public, partners, judges, and employees. Specifically, the Courts will advocate for and help plan for enough courtrooms, suitable public areas, and needed office space. The Courts also will pursue facilities and spaces that are modern, well maintained/clean, safe, secure, and ultimately build trust and confidence in the judicial branch.

The Courts currently do not have room to grow. They need additional courtrooms, offices, and public areas to meet growing demand. Additionally, opportunities exist to evaluate and repurpose existing spaces as well as continue to enhance security ensuring a safe environment for all who use and work at the Courts.

#### **Long Range Goals and Strategies**

Goal 1: The Courts' facilities will meet current and evolving needs and allow for future growth.

Strategies:

- a. Collaborate with the Office of the County Executive and Board of Commissioners to acquire additional space or expand existing space (e.g., courtrooms, hearing rooms, staff offices, meeting rooms, and public areas).
- b. Assess and better use existing space, repurposing to meet current and evolving needs.
- c. Anticipate and plan for future growth in collaboration with county partners.

Goal 2: The Courts' facilities will be welcoming, clean, and physically accessible to all.

Strategies:

- a. Assess and improve physical access to court facilities.
- b. Collaborate with county partners to maintain and modernize court facilities/space.
- c. Implement changes that will improve access to and navigation throughout court facilities.

Goal 3: All those coming to the Courts will be in a healthy, safe, and secure environment.

Strategies:

- a. Continually assess and improve safety and security protocols, procedures, and practices.
- b. Advocate for repairs, maintenance, and improvements that ensure a healthy, safe, and secure environment.
- c. Strengthen emergency preparedness by improving and updating procedures.
- d. Communicate and train judges, staff, and partners on safety and security prevention and response.

---

## ***SFA 4: Workforce of the Future***

**Description:** Workforce expectations including how and where work is done have shifted significantly in the past few years. Preparing now for a workforce of the future is essential for continued success. The Courts are committed to modernizing human resource, management and workplace practices to ensure the Court is an employer of choice for people interested in public service.

Currently, the Courts rely on County HR for many services. The Courts are experiencing difficulties recruiting for and filling vacant positions, and retention and impending retirements remain long-term concerns. The Courts want to make improvements to help attract, retain, and motivate employees and develop the next generation of managers and leaders. Advocating for competitive pay and benefits, providing training and development, expanding career advancement opportunities, and embracing employee well-being and engagement initiatives are among the improvements needed to meet the existing and changing expectations of employees.

### **Long Range Goals and Strategies**

Goal 1: Employees will feel informed, valued, and appreciated.

Strategies:

- a. Improve two-way communication throughout the Courts (e.g., share information and listen to the ideas and opinions of employees, use multiple methods to distribute/share information).
- b. Provide employees with consistent and ongoing feedback about their progress and performance, including recognition for accomplishments.
- c. Demonstrate to employees that they are appreciated and that their managers care.
- d. Build relationships within and across departments and the Courts.

Goal 2: Employees will be engaged, motivated, and satisfied.

Strategies:

- a. Make work meaningful by connecting work to a compelling purpose.
- b. Expand and encourage education, training, and cross-training opportunities.
- c. Provide and promote opportunities for employees to learn, grow, and advance in their positions and careers at the Courts.
- d. Develop and prepare future managers, leaders, and successors across the Courts (e.g., job shadowing, leadership development, and mentoring).

Goal 3: The Courts will be a sought-after and attractive public sector employer.

Strategies:

- a. Promote the compelling mission and vision of the Courts.
- b. Provide competitive pay and benefits to employees.
- c. Refine and expand flexible work options (e.g., hybrid work, flexible hours, alternative work arrangements).
- d. Improve and expand recruitment practices and internship opportunities (e.g., high schools, colleges/universities/law schools).



---

## ***SFA 5: External Relations and Judicial Branch Independence***

**Description:** Having positive, collaborative relations with County, State, and justice system/community partners is a high priority for the Courts. Also, of paramount importance is preserving judicial branch independence and ensuring the separation of powers from the legislative and executive branches of government as provided by the United States and Michigan Constitutions. The Courts will continue to enhance relations among all partners and stakeholders while maintaining judicial branch independence.

The lines between court departments, other offices/agencies (e.g., clerk’s office, prosecutor’s office, Sheriff Dept., MDOC, etc.), and roles and responsibilities of employees from various agencies are blurred. The Courts will work to improve communication and collaboration among justice system partners and county stakeholders while seeking to maintain respect for the independent and separate functions of each. Court leadership will continue to advocate for sufficient funding and the flexibility to manage, allocate, and reallocate resources to meet changing needs and demands.

### **Long Range Goals and Strategies**

Goal 1: The Courts will have and maintain collaborative relations with County and State partners and stakeholders.

Strategies:

- a. Communicate and meet regularly with stakeholders and justice system and community partners.
- b. Collaborate with partners and stakeholders to identify mutually beneficial goals that will improve the Courts and justice system and use resources responsibly.
- c. Educate partners and stakeholders about and advocate for the needs and priorities of the Courts.

Goal 2: The Courts will maintain judicial branch independence consistent with the United States and Michigan Constitutions.

Strategies:

- a. Educate stakeholders and partners on the importance, and the requirement, of an independent judicial branch and appropriate communication practices.
- b. Facilitate support of judicial branch independence from outside entities.
- c. Develop and implement concrete steps the Courts can take to demonstrate the requirement for and necessity of being a separate and independent branch of government.

Goal 3: The Courts will have optimal flexibility to use judicial branch resources responsibly, efficiently, and effectively.

Strategies:

- a. Educate stakeholders about the benefits of having autonomy over the Courts’ budget.
- b. Present compelling rationale and strategies for achieving the desired ends.
- c. Demonstrate accountability for the use (allocation and reallocation) of public resources.
- d. Pursue grant funding to support, improve, and expand court programs and services.

**Appendix A: Positive, Future Scenarios**

**Positive Future Scenarios**

**Scenario #1: Using Technology to Improve Access, Services, and Programs**

- a. The Courts are using new and emerging technologies to improve court operations (e.g., e-filing) and enhance customer services (e.g., generative artificial intelligence (AI), court apps, interactive kiosks, and ability to make payments electronically).
- b. The kiosks and/or court apps provide access to secure case history/case information, allow for direct communication with probation, attorney, other court staff; allow court users to file documents and/or make payments, and the like.
- c. All related court cases are linked (domestic, juvenile, district, probate).
- d. The technology helps connect court users and families to community resources.
- e. Additionally, advanced technologies and other innovative practices allow the Courts to rethink and reimagine the court culture and work arrangements. The Courts have found an optimal mix of onsite and remote work, thereby expanding services to virtual court customers. Finally, the Courts have developed non-traditional hours/flexible hours and have also expanded onsite access to services and programs.

**Scenario #2: Achieving the Courts' Vision: Justice for, and Highest Quality of Services to, All**

- a. The Courts are accessible onsite, virtually, and online.
- b. Onsite and virtual services have been expanded. Self-help, language, and other services are readily available to those in need.
- c. The budget has been realigned with priorities and is supporting essential functions. The budgeting process is free of politics.
- d. The Courts are using new and emerging technologies. Equipment and technologies are reliable and sustainable. Judges and staff have been trained in the new technologies.
- e. There is ample space for everyone – judges, staff, the public, justice partners. Facilities and space have been modernized, refreshed, and repurposed (where feasible).
- f. The work environment is excellent. Qualified job candidates are attracted to the Courts; they are dedicated to the Courts' mission, strive to achieve the vision, and live the core values.
- g. The Courts have excellent relations with justice system and community partners; all collaborate to improve the justice system and services to the public.

**Scenario #3: Better Service via a Satisfied and Engaged Workforce**

- a. The Courts are addressing and improving recruitment and retention issues. New and innovative practices are being tested and used. Court leadership is working with the County and advocating for competitive pay and benefits, and other programs and incentives that increase employee loyalty, satisfaction, and engagement. Examples include pensions, monetary and non-monetary incentives, parental leave, wellness programs, childcare, and tuition reimbursement.
- b. Employees receive the training they need to perform their jobs well; they also have growth and development opportunities.
- c. With a skilled, satisfied, and engaged workforce, court performance and service to the public have soared.

---

**Positive Future Scenarios**

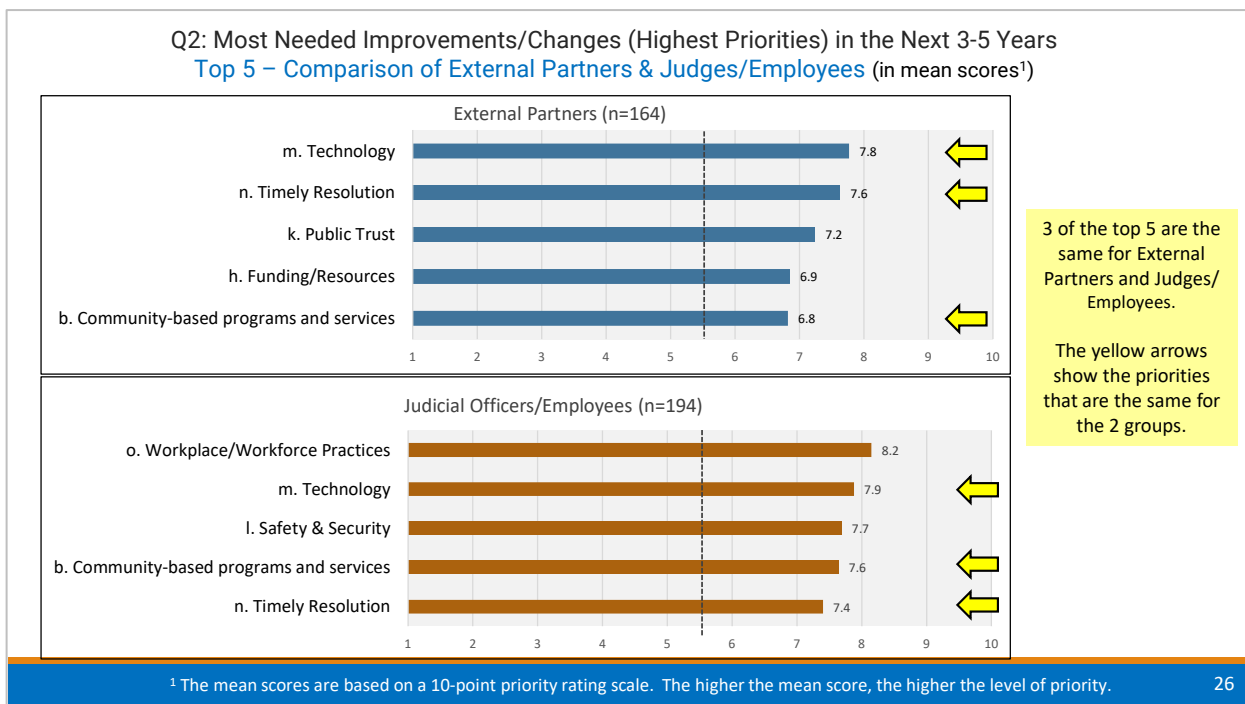
- d. The Courts are using new technologies to implement operational efficiencies and enhance onsite and virtual services – e.g., all courts are on e-filing and moving to a paperless system, systems are integrated, and the Courts are sharing appropriate data across Courts in Michigan.
- e. Cases continue to be resolved in an effective and efficient manner.
- f. The Courts are accessible virtually through community access points and physically at courthouses across the County.
- g. Respect for the Courts is on the rise.

## Appendix B: 2023 Strategic Planning Survey Results – Executive Summary

Two strategic planning surveys were conducted in November 2023. The first included justice system and community partners (external partners) and the second included judicial officers and court employees. A third set of data, which included a survey of court users conducted by the State Court Administrative Office in September of 2023, also was used in developing the Courts’ Strategic Plan.

Below is a summary of survey results. The ideas and voices of many people are included in the results. One hundred and sixty-four (164) partners, five hundred and twenty-one (521) court users, and one hundred and ninety-four (194) judges and employees completed the surveys.

### Findings



### 1. Highest Priorities: Most Needed Changes and Improvements in the Next 3-5 Years

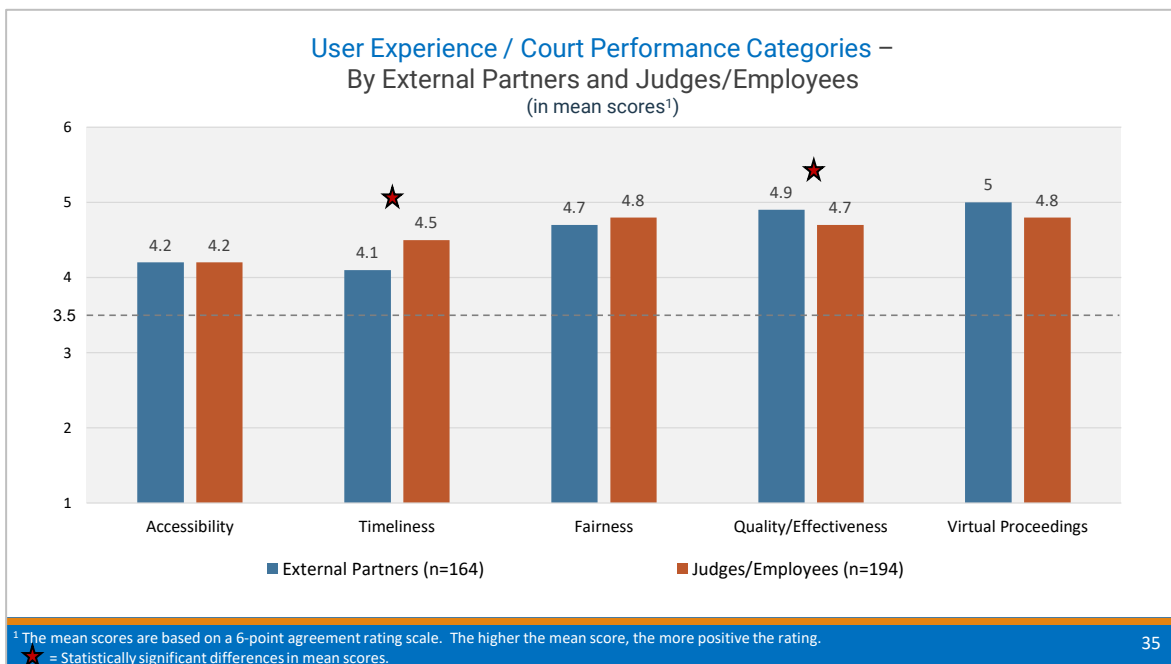
External partners and judges/employees were asked to help prioritize needed changes and improvements in the next 3-5 years. The five highest rated areas for improvement/changes by partners and judges/employees are shown in the chart above.

- Three of the five highest rated priorities were the same for external partners and judicial officers/employees (only in different order). The three areas that were the same, are presented below in rank order by external partners:
  - a. *Technology*: invest in/use existing & future technologies that will enhance access, services, & court operations; enhance tech/data security; safeguard against cyber threats/attacks

- b. *Timely Resolution*: ensure the timely resolution of all legal matters; reduce backlogs; reduce wait times & unnecessary delay; improve scheduling/case mgt. practices; normalize procedures/ practices for in-person and virtual court proceedings
  - c. *Community-based programs and services*: collaborate with partners to enhance/ expand community and social service programs and services (e.g. behavioral health/substance use, housing, education, employment)
- The other highest rated priorities for the two survey groups were:
    - a. *External Partners*: build “Public Trust” and pursue adequate and/or realign “Funding/ Resources”
    - b. *Judicial Officers/Employees*: modernize “Workplace/Workforce Practices” and strengthen “Safety and Security” for all who use/work in the Courts.

**2. Court User Experience / Court Performance Categories – Overall Ratings**

This set of survey questions asked respondents to rate their experiences (if a court user) or the Courts’ performance (for external partners, judges, and employees) on five commonly accepted trial court performance categories: (1) *Accessibility*; (2) *Timeliness*; (3) *Fairness*; (4) *Quality/ Effectiveness*; and (5) *Virtual Proceedings/Services*. Each court performance category included multiple questions that measure different dimensions, or aspects, of the category.



- As per the chart above, External Partners rated the “Virtual Proceedings” and “Quality and Effectiveness” categories of questions the highest and the “Timeliness” and “Accessibility” questions the lowest. External partners gave the Courts significantly higher ratings on the “Quality and Effectiveness” questions and significantly lower ratings on the “Timeliness” questions.
- Judicial officers and employees rated the “Fairness” and “Virtual Proceedings” questions the highest and gave the lowest ratings to the “Accessibility” and “Timeliness” questions.

**3. Court Performance Categories: Accessibility, Timeliness, Fairness, Quality/Effectiveness, Virtual Proceedings/Services**

**Ratings of Court Users:** Below are the results of the court user survey conducted by the State Court Administrative Office in September 2023. This set of questions, which is used statewide, measures aspects of access, timeliness, fairness, and quality/effectiveness. The SCAO survey is administered statewide every two years.

Survey Item	Mean	n	
Q1 I was able to easily find my way around	4.57	521	
Q2 I was helped quickly today	4.57	517	
Q3 I felt safe at the courthouse today	4.70	518	
Q4 The security screening process was organized and efficient	4.70	516	
Q5 I completed my business easily	4.61	515	
Q6 I completed my business in a reasonable amount of time	4.54	515	
Q7 Staff treated me the same as everybody else	4.64	518	
Q8 Staff listened to what I had to say	4.61	515	
Q9 Staff did their best to help me	4.63	515	
Q10 Staff were friendly and respectful	4.67	514	
Q11 Michigan courts do a good job overall	4.22	514	
Q12 I trust Michigan courts to handle my business in the future	4.25	502	
Q13 Michigan courts provide equal justice to all	4.13	505	
Q14 They treated everyone with courtesy and respect	4.55	347	
Q15 They seemed prepared for the hearing	4.54	333	
Q16 They treated me the same as everybody else	4.55	331	
Q17 They listened to what I had to say	4.57	331	
Q18 They clearly explained any decisions to me	4.73	327	
Q19 The way the case was handled was fair	4.44	319	
Q20 The outcome in the case was favorable to me	4.32	313	
Q21 I understand what happened in the case	4.52	312	
Q22 The court scheduling process was clear and simple	4.52	313	
	Yes	No	
Q23 Was the case delayed even if you didn't want it to be	17%	83%	277

Court User Results -  
Sept. 2023  
(in means – 5-point rating scale<sup>1</sup>)

<sup>1</sup>Means = average ratings based on 5-point rating scale: (5) Strongly Agree; (4) Agree; (3) Neutral; (2) Disagree; (1) Strongly Disagree.

- As per the chart above, court users gave high ratings on all questions. All means are above 4.0 (on a 5-point rating scale).
- Court users rated the Courts the highest in the following areas:
  - Judges clearly explaining decisions to them
  - Feeling safe at the courthouse
  - Feeling the screening process was organized and efficient.



- 
- Court users gave the lowest ratings to the following questions:
    - a. Michigan courts provide equal justice to all
    - b. Michigan courts do a good job overall
    - c. Trusting Michigan courts to handle their business in the future.

#### **Accessibility – Ratings of External Partners & Judges/Employees**

- External partners and judges/employees alike indicated there is room for improvement across all of the access related questions, which included:
  - a. Making it easier to get information from the Court about cases/matters in which they are involved.
  - b. Helping court users who need assistance.
  - c. Helping court users understand what they need to do to attend/participate in a court proceeding or complete their court business.

#### **Timeliness – Ratings of External Partners & Judges/Employees**

- The ratings of external partners and judges/employees suggest improvements are needed in the following areas:
  - a. Reduce the wait times – make the wait times more reasonable – for scheduling and/or conducting hearings/trials, and for appointments with the Court for other services.
  - b. Start court events on time; when they are scheduled to begin.
  - c. Resolve cases/legal matters and handle other court business in a reasonable amount of time.

#### **Fairness – Ratings of External Partners & Judges/Employees**

- External partners and judges/employees gave relatively high ratings on most of the fairness questions. Court users also gave high ratings to the outcome and procedural fairness questions on the SCAO survey (as referenced above).
- The highest rated areas by external partners and judges/employees on the fairness questions included:
  - a. Judicial and court employees treat court users with respect.
  - b. Court users are given an opportunity to be heard/present their case.
  - c. Judicial officers apply rules/procedures fairly.
  - d. Judicial officers are impartial in their rules/decisions and are fair in deciding cases/legal matters.
- The question rated the lowest by partners and judges/employees, and thus, an area for improvement, was:
  - a. Court users understand what they need to do when they leave the courtroom, courthouse, or virtual hearing/meeting.

Fairness:  
High ratings were given on most of the fairness questions.

Treating court users with respect, court users having an opportunity to be heard, applying rules/procedures fairly, and making fair decisions were among the highest rated fairness questions.

## Quality/Effectiveness – Ratings of External Partners & Judges/Employees

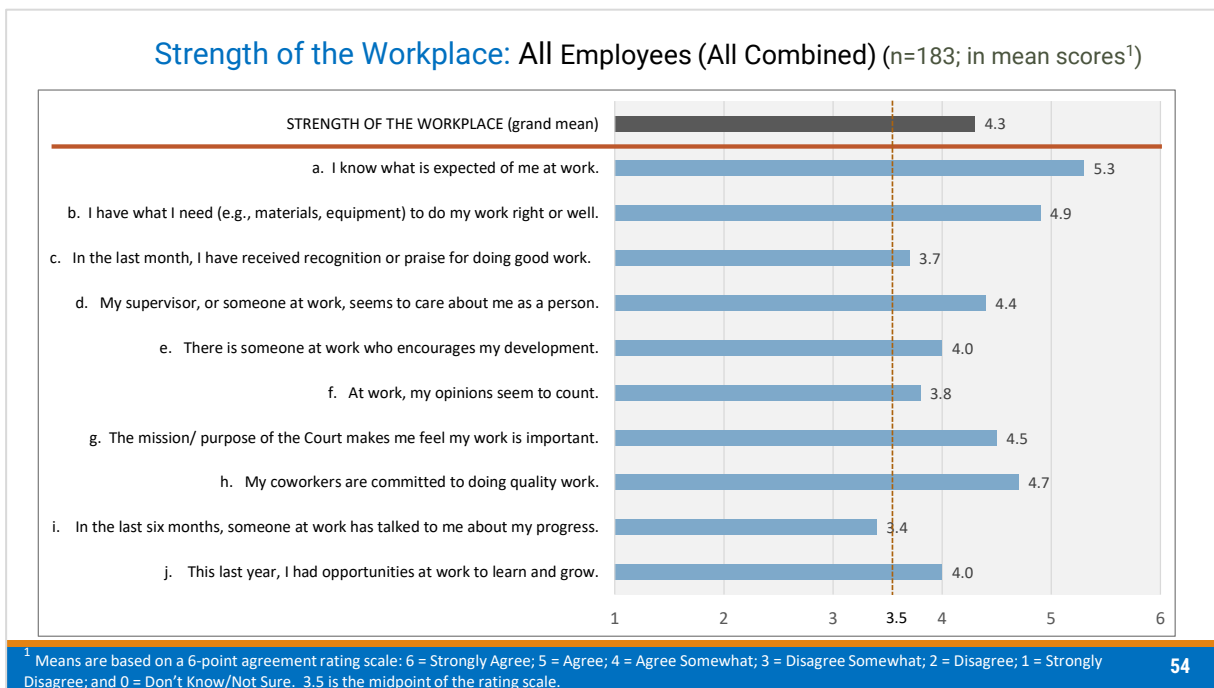
- External partners indicated they feel safe at the courthouse. Judges and employees rated this question significantly lower than partners.
- External partners and judges/employees gave the lowest rating to a question pertaining to the Court’s facilities. Specifically, accessibility (parking, ADA, signage) and space (having sufficient courtrooms/space, and cleaning and modernizing space, etc.) were areas in need of improvement.

## Virtual Proceedings/Services – Ratings of External Partners & Judges/Employees

- Partners and judges/employees rated questions pertaining to virtual proceedings and services highly. The highest ratings were given to:
  - a. Virtual proceedings being an acceptable method for conducting routine legal matters and
  - b. All feeling competent to participate in and host/oversee video court proceedings and services.

## 4. Strength of the Workplace, Court Culture, and Job Satisfaction – Employees Only

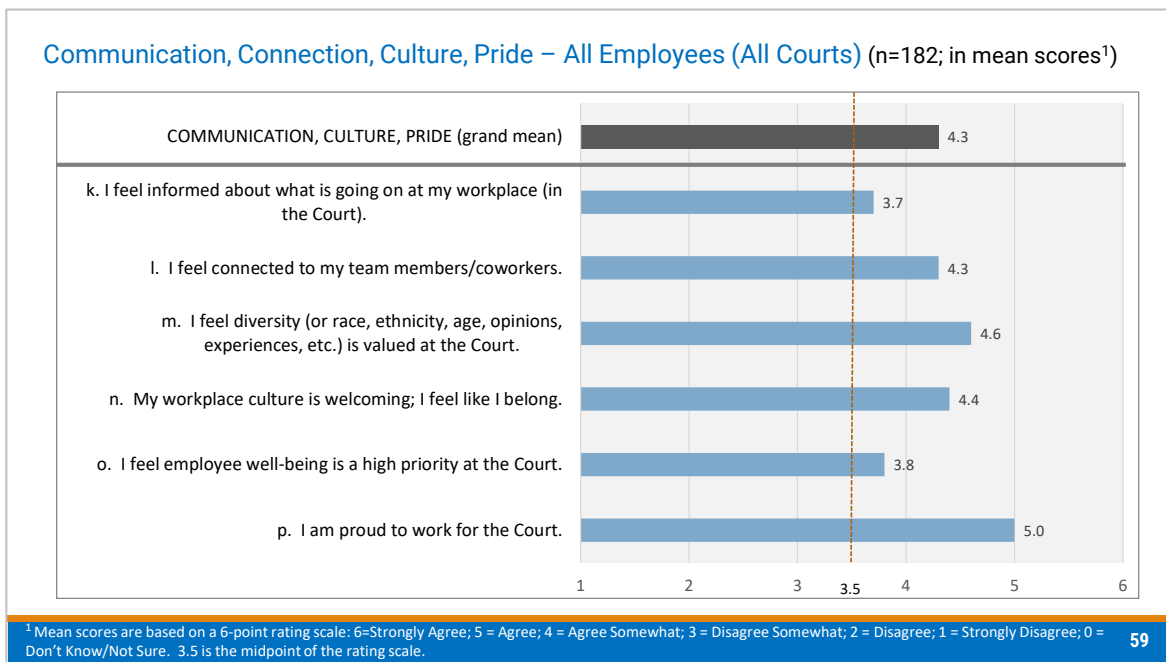
- The chart below shows employees’ ratings on the strength of the workplace questions. The highest rated areas were:
  - a. Employees know what is expected of them at work.
  - b. Employees have what they need to do their work right or well.
  - c. Coworkers are committed to doing quality work.



- Areas for improvement included:
  - a. Providing employees with praise and recognition for doing good work.
  - b. Providing employees with feedback about their progress.
  - c. Ensuring employees are heard and their opinions matter.

## 5. Communication, Connection, Culture, and Pride – Employees Only

- Employees gave the highest rating to: I am proud to work for the Court.
- The lowest rated questions were: I feel informed about what is going on at my workplace (in the Court) and I feel employee well-being is a high priority at the Court.



## 6. Job Satisfaction – Employees Only

### Job Satisfaction:

Overall job satisfaction was rated highly by employee respondents. Nearly 70% agreed or strongly agreed with this statement:

*Overall, I am satisfied with my job.*

- 
- Suggestions for making the Courts a better place to work included:
    - a. Improve recruitment and hiring practices
    - b. Show appreciation – recognize employees for their contributions to the Court
    - c. Improve morale / build relationships across the Courts
    - d. Increase training, development, and career advancement opportunities
    - e. Strengthen hybrid / flexible work options
    - f. Provide competitive pay and benefits
    - g. Strengthen management / supervision practices (e.g., better communication/ information sharing; provide feedback on progress; recognize employees; solicit input from employees/give employees a voice, etc.).

## **7. Court of the Future/Future Goals**

- External partners and judges/employees suggested the Courts pursue the following goals/ innovative ideas as they prepare for the future:
  - a. Enhance the use of technology
  - b. Improve access and services
  - c. Improve facilities, space, security, and parking
  - d. Improve case management, scheduling, and timely resolution
  - e. Strengthen court and community programs (in collaboration with justice system and community partners)
- Additionally, external partners suggested the Courts continue to improve, expand, and standardize the use of virtual proceedings, which will make the Courts more accessible, efficient, and affordable for court users.
- Judges/employees also suggested the Courts prioritize and enhance employee wellbeing and maintain high levels of satisfaction (e.g., provide competitive pay/benefits; value/appreciate staff; strengthen teams and relationships; improve communication; provide training and career advancement opportunities; strengthen hybrid/flexible work arrangements; etc.)