VENTURA SUPERIOR COURT

2024-2028
STRATEGIC PLAN

"RESETTING, REIMAGINING, AND PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE"

NOVEMBER, 2024

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Additional Strategic Planning Resources

1. External Trends – https://www.ventura.courts.ca.gov/pdf_files/SP/VSC_SP_External_Trends.pdf
2. Internal Trends – https://www.ventura.courts.ca.gov/pdf_files/SP/VSC_SP_Internal_Trends.pdf

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Judge Kevin G. DeNoce
Presiding Judge

Judge Matthew P. Guasco
Assistant Presiding Judge

Brenda L. McCormick
Court Executive Officer

Superior Court of California
COUNTY OF VENTURA

Letter from Presiding Judge / Assistant Presiding Judge/ CEO

The Superior Court of California, County of Ventura is pleased to present the 2024-2028 Strategic Plan. This Strategic Plan is the result of a collaborative effort of the judicial and administrative leadership of the Court, which was facilitated by Dr. Brenda Wagenknecht-Ivey, a recognized expert in court strategic planning. The Strategic Plan was made possible by a generous grant from the State Justice Institute. The strategic planning process spanned approximately one year. During that time, the Court extensively surveyed those who frequently interact with the Court, (e.g., jurors, lawyers, law enforcement), as well as local governmental and non-governmental organizations who represent the interests of many Ventura County residents who engage with or are affected by the Court's operations. The Planning Team of judges and court administrators studied the survey information and developed this Strategic Plan around a common theme and four core strategic objectives.

The theme of "Resetting, Reimagining, and Preparing for the Future," describes the Court's goal of adapting to rapidly changing legal, societal, technological, and budgetary environments. The many changes affecting the administration of justice require the Court to anticipate, innovate and adapt as never before. Severe budgetary limitations will require the Court to be creative in managing these changes in the coming years. This Strategic Plan attempts to chart a course by identifying four core strategic objectives: (1) Improve the Court User Experience, (2) Enhance Operational Excellence and Efficiency, (3) Improve the Employee Experience and (4) Improve Facilities, Space and Security.

The Strategic Plan is a dynamic process and not a static document. A key component of the Strategic Plan is the ongoing work of the Strategic Planning Committee, which will continually monitor progress on the implementation of the Strategic Plan each year. In this way, the Strategic Plan is an active blueprint which can be adapted and improved as the objectives of the plan are implemented and assessed. These objectives and efforts support the Court's new vision:

"To maintain the public's trust and confidence by providing equal justice and the highest quality of services for all."

The Court would like to thank Dr. Wagenknecht-Ivie, the Judges and Commissioners, the Court Executive Officer, and court administrative staff whose hard work and dedication produced this Strategic Plan. The Court also would like to thank the Judges, Commissioners, court staff, stakeholders, attorneys, jurors, law enforcement agencies, and local governmental and non-governmental organizations who participated in the surveys which provided needed information in the planning process. Most importantly, the Court would like to thank the residents of the County of Ventura for permitting us the great honor and privilege of serving the important cause of justice for their benefit. This Strategic Plan is dedicated to the fulfillment of that public trust.

Strategic Planning Team

Hon. Matthew P. Guasco, Assistant Presiding Judge Chair, Strategic Planning Committee	Hon. JoAnn Johnson Supervising Family Law Judge
Hon. Benjamin F. Coats Supervising Civil Judge	Hon. F. Dino Inumerable Juvenile Delinquency Judge
Hon. Roger L. Lund Probate Judge	Hon. Catherine M. Voelker Criminal Jury Trials Judge
Brenda L. McCormick, Court Executive Officer Administration	Robert Sherman, Assistant Executive Officer Fiscal, Finance, Planning, Collections
Pat Patterson, Deputy Executive Officer IT, Human Resources, Interpreters	Julie Dransart, Deputy Executive Officer Civil/Family Law Clerk's Offices & Juvenile & East County Courthouses
Lorraine Benavides, Director of Human Resources Court Human Resources	Denise Gooding, Senior Manager Hall of Justice - Criminal
Jodi Prior, Managing Attorney Professional Services	Dr. Brenda J. Wagenknecht-Ivey, Consultant CEO, PRAXIS Consulting, Inc.

2024 – 2028 Strategic Plan

November 2024

Section 1: Overview

The Superior Court of California, County of Ventura (Court) is pleased to present its 2024 – 2028 Strategic Plan that will serve as a compass for the next few years. The Strategic Plan includes the Court's refreshed mission, vision, and core values, along with strategic focus areas, long range goals, and strategies for making future changes and improvements. The implementation of this Strategic Plan will help the Court achieve its vision of the future, which is to *"maintain the public's trust by providing equal justice and the highest quality of services for all."*

Led and supported by judicial and administrative leadership and the Judicial Strategic Planning Committee, a small Planning Team of judicial and administrative leaders was formed in 2023 for purposes of developing a future direction and priorities for the Court. The Strategic Planning Team (Team), with facilitation and consulting assistance from Dr. Brenda Wagenknecht-Ivey, CEO of PRAXIS Consulting, Inc., developed the Plan using data and information from internal and external trends and findings from the strategic planning surveys.

Four strategic focus areas (SFAs) emerged from the planning process. The Plan includes a brief description, long range goals, and strategies for each of the SFAs, which are:

Implementation of the Strategic Plan will begin in 2024. The Court has also developed an Annual Operational Plan for the strategic initiatives / projects the Court is working on each year. Accomplishing strategic initiatives each year will help the Court fulfill its mission, work toward its vision, and make progress on the long-range goals in each of the key focus areas.

Section 2: Mission, Vision, and Core Values

The Court's refreshed mission, vision, and core values are presented below.

Mission:

Our court is here to serve with excellence.

Vision:

To maintain the public's trust and confidence by providing equal justice and the highest quality of services for all.

Values:

Fairness
Access
Integrity
Respect

Section 3: Trends Analysis – External and Internal

A Planning Team of judges and court administrative staff examined a myriad of external and internal trends, as part of the planning process. This included social, demographic, economic, policy, technological, and justice system external trends data, as well as internal trends data concerning current and future needs, opportunities, areas of vulnerability, changes, and improvements relating to court operations and services.

The Planning Team considered a positive, future scenario – or future narrative – for the Court. This scenario, which is included as Appendix A, provides a description of what the future might or could look like for the Court when it anticipates and responds effectively to the many external and internal trends affecting Court operations and services.

Likely Future Implications: Below are likely future implications of external trends affecting the Court.

1. The Court will serve increasingly diverse populations.
2. Economic uncertainty and related budgetary pressures likely will continue.
3. The needs and expectations of court users will continue to change and expand.
4. Ensuring equal access to justice for all people will continue to be a priority.
5. The Court must be innovative and implement ways to operate and manage cases more efficiently and effectively.
6. The Court will continue to feel the effects of a divided and litigious society.
7. The Court must update existing technologies and implement new and emerging technologies in the future to enhance services and improve court operations.
8. The Court must develop a long-term approach to address facilities, space, and ongoing security concerns and needs.
9. The Court must be proactive in educating the public about the Court and building trust and confidence of the public and communities across the County.
10. The Court must adopt innovative ways of responding to the new future of work and changing employee expectations, ensuring the Court is and continues to be a desirable place to work.
11. The Court must manage and adapt to fluctuating and challenging budget conditions in the future.

Future Needs and Opportunities: Future needs and opportunities exist in the following areas.

12. Providing access and navigational assistance and services to all communities in the County.
13. Improving case management practices, streamlining court processes, and refining remote proceedings.
14. Improving the use of existing, and staying abreast of new and evolving, technologies and automation.
15. Having greater flexibility to reallocate and realign budgetary, staffing and technology resources to respond to changing needs and workloads.
16. Ensuring adequate staffing levels and effectively addressing staffing shortages.
17. Fostering a positive work environment and adapting to the new future of work.
18. Building public trust and confidence through outreach and other measures.

Positive, Future Scenario for the Court

A scenario is a plausible history or narrative of the future. The Planning Team considered the effects of external and internal trends, as well as the needs and opportunities they created, and developed a positive, future scenario for the Court. Below is a summary of the themes. See Appendix A for details.

A positive future scenario for the Court includes the following.

1. Expanding uses of technology
2. Make navigating the court easier (e.g., via technology or online; physical movement; understanding the system)
3. Improving all aspects of access for court users
4. Improving the work environment and emphasize overall judge/employee wellbeing
5. Reimagining court operations to achieve greater efficiencies across all divisions
6. Improving internal communication, cooperation, collaboration across areas of the Court
7. Improving and expanding court facilities – e.g., access in the East County; remodel/improve the Ventura Hall of Justice and Juvenile Courthouse; expand/modernize/remodel courtrooms / public areas/ offices; repurpose existing space

Section 4: Organizational Assessment

The Court has both strengths and areas for improvement as per the results of the 2023-2024 strategic planning surveys.

Below is a short list of the Court's greatest strengths and areas for improvement. Also included below are potential threats and/or biggest obstacles facing the Court in the coming years.

Strengths	Areas for Improvement
1. Access and Programs/Services (e.g., Ability to Pay, language access, self-help and mediator programs) 2. Excellent customer service (per court user feedback) 3. Skilled, experienced, and dedicated judges and employees 4. Fairness of the judiciary (per external partner survey) 5. Job Satisfaction (per employee survey) and positive work environment 6. Technological improvements (e.g., use of remote procedures per the survey results; Civil and Probate case management, the Ventura County Integrated Justice System (VICJIS 2.0) in progress, etc.) 7. Commitment to continuous improvement 8. Good reputation across the state; attorneys are happy to practice in this Court	1. Access and navigation (e.g., improvements to website, understandable information; appointment scheduling; wayfinding; public education and outreach) 2. Case Management/Court Operations/Workload Distribution (e.g., use effective case management practices – reduce number of continuances, address workload disparities, resolve matters in a timely manner/reduce case age, improve operational efficiencies; distribute resources as needed to meet workload demands / increase flexibility to balance workloads; use data to better manage caseloads/make operational decisions) 3. Technology (e.g., complete installation of virtual courtrooms; implement e-filing and expand eCourt to Family Law, Juvenile; complete the modernization of the Ventura County Integrated Justice System (VCIJIS 2.0)) 4. Staffing levels are inadequate, staffing shortages persist; improve morale and make workplace/workforce improvements (e.g., communication, wellbeing, training and cross-training, supportive feedback) 5. Facilities (e.g., HOJ, Simi, and JC improvements – update, remodel, maintain facilities; better use of Simi Courthouse space) 6. Resistance / Slow to Change and Reactive: can be resistant to new ideas / change 7. External Communication: Outreach to the Public and Partners (e.g., local colleges for recruitment, public relations and education about the courts)

Potential Threats/Biggest Obstacles:

1. Overcoming resistance to change / lack of follow-through, fear of change
2. Funding (e.g., limited financial resources – funding determined by the legislature, Governor, Judicial Council, and financial cycle)
3. The ability to effectively address the internal and external economic factors that have the potential to adversely affect employer-employee relations
4. Developing and maintaining positive employer-employee relations (e.g., developing shared objectives with employees; compromising on important issues; aligning priorities; providing supportive feedback and consistent guidance/direction)
5. Statutes / unfunded legislative mandates
6. Complacency - reacting to the day-to-day rather than being proactive/looking to the future
7. Time/resource limitations
8. Heavy workloads leading to burnout
9. Constraints of being a governmental agency (e.g., ability to accommodate remote work; lack of incentives to attract and retain highly skilled workforce)
10. Changes in workforce expectations
11. Impending retirements (judges and employees) in the next few years, which will result in a loss of experience and institutional knowledge, as well as chronic under-staffing
12. Keeping up with and being able to support existing and emerging technologies (e.g., website functionality, interactive, AI, social media)
13. Security for Judges/Commissioners/employees; threat environment has increased; cyber security
14. Lack of space to expand at HOJ
15. Maintain and promote the public's trust and confidence in the justice system – continue to demonstrate fairness, impartiality, and neutrality

Section 5: Strategic Focus Areas (SFAs), Goals, and Strategies

This section includes the Court's four strategic focus areas, long-range goals, and strategies for making changes and improvements.

Strategic focus areas (SFAs) are significant issues / topics that are vitally important to the future of the Court. They are high level, multi-issue topics that are of strategic importance. SFAs typically present as either challenges that must be addressed and/or overcome, or opportunities that should be seized.

Long range goals are the end targets the Court is striving to achieve in each of the strategic focus areas.

Strategies are what you will do to achieve the goals.

The strategic planning survey results helped inform the identification of the strategic focus areas and the establishment of goals and strategies presented below.

1 *SFA 1: Improve the Court User Experience*

Description. Improving the Court User Experience is a high priority for the Court. This includes:

- Improving access to (a) the Court, (b) court services in all areas of the County, and (c) court and case information.
- Helping court users navigate the Court, including understanding what they need to do to complete their court business.
- Enhancing and expanding services and programs, (e.g., self-help, language).
- Expanding the use of technology to enhance access, customer service, and the ability to do business with the Court.

Enhancements and expansions in the above areas are supported by the results of the strategic planning surveys.

Long Range Goals and Strategies:

Goal 1: The Court will be user-friendly and easy to navigate.

Strategies:

a. Improve online access to resources and court and case information.
b. Enhance (user-friendly) in-person and virtual services.
c. Develop physical navigation and wayfinding at the courthouse/court locations.

Goal 2: The Court will provide equal access to all people across the county.

Strategies:

a. Expand language assistance and maintain and improve self-help services.
b. Enhance and expand virtual court services.
c. Improve the juror experience and increase juror participation rates.
d. Use existing and new technologies to increase access and enhance ability to conduct business - in person and remotely – across the County.

2 *SFA 2: Enhance Operational Excellence & Efficiency*

Description: The Court is striving for operational excellence. This includes resolving legal matters and cases in a fair, timely, and efficient manner and operating efficiently and effectively. The Court also recognizes the importance of being innovative and proactive to effectively navigate the future environment.

To achieve operational excellence and efficiency and to be responsive to the results of the strategic planning surveys, improvement opportunities include:

- Improving case management practices (e.g., fewer continuances, reduce backlogs).
- Streamlining court processes and making them more consistent and understandable.
- Strengthening and expanding practices around virtual/remote proceedings.
- Balancing workloads.
- Allocating / re-allocating resources to balance workloads and meet service demands.
- Demonstrating procedural fairness.
- Upgrading courtroom and other technology to improve effectiveness and efficiency.
- Being more proactive and innovative.

Long Range Goals and Strategies:

Goal 1: The Court will resolve cases in a fair, timely, and efficient manner.

Strategies:

a. Expand the use of effective caseflow management principles and practices for all case types (e.g., reduce continuances, triage cases, schedule status conferences, retain firm trial dates).
b. Use data analytics to improve caseflow management and operational efficiency.
c. Expand ADR programs in civil cases.
d. Balance workloads within and across divisions of the Court.
e. Improve the diversity of the juror pool and participation rates.
f. Demonstrate procedural fairness, (e.g., treat all parties respectfully, provide opportunity to be heard, explain process, provide adequate time for each litigant).
g. Train and cross-train employees.
h. Collaborate with justice partners to reduce delay, time to disposition, and case backlogs (including efficient handling of paperwork – Clerk's Office).

Goal 2: The Court will build and maintain the public's trust and confidence.

Strategies:

a. Treat all people respectfully and professionally.
b. Improve juror understanding and confidence, (e.g., education, appreciation, and efficiency).
c. Provide consistent information to and educate the public.
d. Expand outreach to all communities across the County.

Goal 3: The Court will be innovative and proactive.

Strategies:

a. Transition to a paperless environment.
b. Expand and standardize remote appearances and virtual court proceedings.
c. Increase the use of digital and other technologies to support court services and increase operational efficiencies.
d. Explore, evaluate, and implement viable operational innovations.
e. Anticipate and prepare in advance for changing conditions and circumstances affecting court services and operations.

3 *SFA 3: Improve the Employee Experience*

Description: The Court is committed to being a place where people desire to work. Training and developing employees so they have the skills to provide excellent service and are able to perform at the highest levels and creating a work environment where employees feel included, supported, valued, and appreciated are high priorities for the Court.

Fostering a desirable, satisfying, and engaging workplace includes:

- Improving and expanding training, cross-training, development, and career development and advancement opportunities.
- Providing employees with regular and ongoing performance feedback.
- Implementing/strengthening employee recognition and appreciation.
- Making wellbeing a priority.
- Providing competitive pay and benefits, and implementing innovative workplace practices.
- Improving communication and information sharing throughout the Court.
- Maintaining good management/union relations.

Long Range Goals and Strategies:

<u>Goal1: Employees will be competent to perform at the highest levels.</u>

Strategies:

a. Strengthen and improve onboarding and new hire training.
b. Improve and expand training and development opportunities (including cross-training).
c. Promote / expand career advancement / promotional opportunities.
d. Provide employees with regular, ongoing performance feedback and coach employees to higher performance.
e. Provide employees with other resources (tools, equipment) needed to do their jobs well.

<u>Goal 2: Employees will feel included, supported, valued, and appreciated.</u>

Strategies:

a. Recognize and appreciate employees for their contributions and performance.
b. Be visible and build connections/relationships with employees (managers and judicial officers).
c. Make employee wellbeing a priority.
d. Coach and mentor employees.
e. Improve communication and information sharing across the Court.
f. Foster an inclusive and bias free working environment.

Goal 3: The Court will be an employer for whom people want to work.

Strategies:

a. Continue advocating for competitive compensation, benefits, and working conditions that appeal to all generations in the workforce.
b. Reimagine outreach and recruitment efforts targeting diverse communities and candidates interested in public service.
c. Improve management/employee communication across all areas of the Court.
d. Make work / all jobs meaningful; connect work/jobs to the Court's compelling mission and vision.
e. Use technology and other innovations to increase employee efficiency and satisfaction.

4 *SFA 4: Improve Facilities, Space, Security*

Description: The Court is committed to improving facilities, space, and security in the coming years. The Court's leadership will continue advocating for needed improvements with state and county partners, focusing on space that meets needs (e.g., is accessible), allows for future growth, and builds the public's trust in the judicial branch.

The Court's leadership will continue to collaborate with partners and advocate for:

- Modernizing, refurbishing, and repurposing space (public areas, courtrooms, offices, meeting rooms, etc.) in existing facilities.
- Developing plans for a new courthouse and securing additional space to serve the public across the County.
- Improved security screening and safety protocols and practices.

Long Range Goals and Strategies:

Goal 1: The Court's facilities and space will meet needs and allow for future growth.

Strategies:

a. Collaborate with County and Judicial Council partners and build support for needed changes/improvements.
b. Recommend repurposing and reconfiguring existing space; explore innovative approaches to using space more efficiently.
c. Advocate for new space (courtrooms, offices, public areas) to meet growing / changing needs.
d. Demonstrate the need and build support for new construction (renovation or new building).

Goal 2: The Court's facilities will be modern, safe, clean and physically accessible.

Strategies:

a. Work with County and Judicial Council partners to improve the current environment of and access to facilities.
b. Collaborate with partners to improve ingress into the building and to improve safety and security procedures and protocols.
c. Seek support to renovate, modernize, and refurbish the court's facilities.

Appendices

Appendix A – Positive, Future Scenario

Positive, Future Scenario

Access and Navigation

- There will be a seamless, user-friendly court technology portal for filing documents, accessing documents, making online payments, using AI/chat bots, etc.; the portal will be reliable, responsive, and easy to use
- The Court's website is easy to use/navigate (e.g., it includes on demand videos, tutorials, up to date information, a Virtual Court Assistant - e.g., available from a query (jury duty, courtroom, etc.) that is both AI and person operated that generates a list of applicable forms, people and resources)
- The Court is easy to navigate and is understandable (e.g., the Court has an interactive court navigation system and/or person available to assist court users whether in-person, virtually, and/or online

Case Management / Case Processing / Operational Efficiency

- Courtroom calendars / hearings will run on time; they will not be delayed or continued unnecessarily
- The Court will have online juror services (e.g., for responding to summons, scheduling, excusals, etc.)
- Go to paper on demand: the Court will transition to electronic case files, which will be easy and intuitive, real-time, and responsive; handling electronic case files will be integrated into remote proceedings, including document signatures and document routing; e-filing is used across the court
- All courtrooms are equipped and allow for reliable remote access; virtual attendance is used for appropriate types of court proceedings (e.g., 80-90% virtual)
- Increase efficiency; reorganize how courtrooms are handling caseloads; improve specialty courts

Workforce

- Staffing shortages are resolved (e.g., court reporters); the Court is fully staffed
- The Court has a high retention rate
- Court employees are experienced, well trained, and comfortable with their duties; they work together to serve court users/the public
- Court employees have training, development, and advancement opportunities
- Court employees are cross trained; they are provided opportunities to learn about and work in other departments increasing understanding of the departments across the court
- Employee wellbeing / wellness is a high priority at the Court (reduce burnout/stress; prioritize work-life balance; offer flexible/alternative hours; etc.)

Technology

- Every courtroom has state of the art audio visual/ technology

Facilities/Security

- Security is improved in all court departments – including physically re-organizing / reorienting work areas for better visibility / monitoring of counters, public service areas, etc.
- Court facilities are meeting current and future needs of court users, partners, judges, and employees (e.g., Court has needed space, courthouses are modernized – professional, clean, ample space for court users, judges, and employees)

Courthouse/Courtroom Decorum

- Respect and decorum are returned to the judicial environment and process
- The public trusts, respects, and has confidence in the Court/judicial branch