

Vision Statement

The vision of the Lake County Judicial System is to be one truly independent and empowered branch of government providing a fair and responsive system of justice while protecting rights and liberties, upholding and interpreting the law, and resolve disputes peacefully, fairly and effectively in Lake County, Illinois. This includes an effectively managed Judiciary and Judicial System that fully utilizes technological advancement and alternative dispute resolution to best serve the public, while seeking the highest possible understanding, trust and confidence.

Mission Statement

The mission of the Circuit Court of Lake County is to serve the public. It accomplishes this mission by providing a fair and efficient system of justice, committed to excellence, fostering public trust, understanding and confidence.

Values Statement

The Circuit Court of Lake County espouses those values and qualities that are reflective of the community, which it serves, and are important to the effective administration of justice. These values permeate all levels and divisions of the Court organization and act as a guiding influence on our daily activities:

- Employee Engagement
- Job Knowledge and Skill Development
- Creativity and Innovation
- Positive Interpersonal Skills
- Effective Communications
- Operational Policies and Procedures
- Performance Benchmarking
- Quality Improvement
- Ethical and Professional Standards
- Superior Client and Customer Service
- Problem-Solving Competence

Administrative Office of the Circuit Court of Lake County, Illinois
Delivering on the Promise: Promoting Organizational Capacity to Improve Strategic Outcomes

Introduction

The Strategic Plan of the Circuit Court of Lake County is a vision of the future that identifies numerous strategies based on values important to the effective administration of justice. The Circuit Court of Lake County, Illinois initiated its strategic planning process in 1996 under the leadership, and at the instigation, of then-Chief Judge Stephen E. Walter. In that year, a court-wide committee produced the first long-range plan, generally referred to as a "plan to plan." That initial document has become, in many respects, the basis for what has occurred through the present. Since its inception, strategic planning in the Court has followed a consistent approach: a participative, top-down/bottom-up, process that connects planning, operations and budgeting. Since 2000, the Strategic Plan has embraced the Trial Court Performance Standards published by the National Center for State¹. These standards group the fundamental responsibilities or purposes of our trial court into five elements: 1) Access to Justice, 2) Expedition and Timeliness, 3) Equality, Fairness and Integrity, 4) Independence and Accountability, 5) Public Trust and Confidence. These standards serve as the foundation for our future activities, both in the short-term and in the long-term. The table below illustrates the number of activities and projects accomplished during the 2000 strategic planning period (2000-06).

2000 STRATEGIC PLAN ACCOMPLISHMENTS (2000-06)			
Goal	Number Activities	Objective	Number Activities
I. Access to Justice	181	A. The Circuit Court of Lake County shall conduct its proceedings and other public business openly.	17
		B. The Court facilities shall be safe, accessible, and convenient to use.	71
		C. All who appear before the Court shall be given the opportunity to participate effectively without undue hardship or inconvenience.	40
		D. Judges and other trial court personnel shall be courteous and responsive to the public and accord respect to all with whom they come in contact.	23
		E. The costs of access to the court's proceedings - whether measured in terms of money, time, or the procedures that must be followed - shall be reasonable, fair and affordable.	30
II. Expedition and Timeliness	83	F. The Circuit Court of Lake County shall establish and comply with recognized guidelines for timely case processing; while at the same time keeping current with its incoming caseload.	65
		G. The Court shall disburse funds promptly, provide reports and information according to required schedules, and respond to requests for information and other services on an established schedule that assures their effective use.	9

¹ Commission on Trial Court Performance Standards (1997). *Trial Court Performance Standards and Measurement System Implementation Manual*. Williamsburg, VA: National Center for State Courts. Retrieved from: [file:///C:/Users/cmrvj/Downloads/Trial Court Performance Standards and Measurement System Implementation Manual.pdf](file:///C:/Users/cmrvj/Downloads/Trial%20Court%20Performance%20Standards%20and%20Measurement%20System%20Implementation%20Manual.pdf)

		H. The Court shall promptly implement changes in law and procedure.	9
III. Equality, Fairness and Integrity	127	I. The trial court procedures shall faithfully adhere to relevant laws, procedural rules and established policies.	28
		J. Jury lists are representative of the jurisdiction from which they are drawn.	33
		K. The court shall give individual attention to cases, deciding them without undue disparity among like cases and upon legally relevant factors.	22
		L. Decisions of the court shall unambiguously address the issues presented to it and make clear how compliance can be achieved.	11
		M. The court shall take appropriate responsibility for the enforcement of its orders.	21
		N. Records of all relevant court decisions and actions shall be accurate and properly preserved.	12
IV. Independence and Accountability	190	O. The Circuit Court of Lake County shall maintain its institutional integrity and observe the principle of comity in its governmental relations.	20
		P. The Circuit Court of Lake County shall responsibly see, use and account for its public resources.	33
		Q. The Circuit Court of Lake County shall use fair employment practices.	40
		R. The Circuit Court of Lake County shall inform the community of its programs.	39
		S. The Circuit Court of Lake County shall, to the best of its ability, anticipate new conditions or emergent events and adjust its operations as necessary.	58
V. Public Trust and Confidence	85	T. The trial court and the justice it delivers shall be perceived by the public as accessible.	30
		U. The Public shall have trust and confidence that the basic court functions are being conducted expeditiously and fairly, and that its decisions have integrity.	40
		V. The trial court shall be perceived as independent, not unduly influenced by other components of government, and accountable.	15
	667		667

Current Strategic Plan – 2009 to Present

A revision of the strategic plan began in 2007; this plan was published in January 2009. This strategic plan cycle was designed to be truly a court organization-wide process, engaging all of judges, court managers, and administrative staff. The 2009 Strategic Plan expanded upon the goals and objectives associated with the Trial Court Performance Standards towards the development of organizational strategies based on those standards, as well as an examination of trends impacting the court organization and an assessment of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) inherent within the court organization. Each strategy and its related implementation plan focus on the

energy and resources of the court organization to realize both the values of the justice system in Lake County and its continued improvement. The Court's 2009 Strategic Plan was an ambitious document, especially in light of the increasing demands and pressures on the Court organization and because of its increasingly limited resources. Nonetheless, following through on this strategic roadmap and priorities has been paramount in order for the Court to continue to provide high levels of judicial and staff services over the past several years. The chart below indicates those strategies that were included within the Court's Strategic Plan in 2009.

2009 STRATEGIC PLAN STRATEGIES AND PLANS		
Strategy Area	Strategic Focus	Plan
Strategy A	Facilities	Develop and update a master facilities plan which documents courtroom and staff space needs.
Strategy B	Website	Continue to improve the court's website with particular emphasis on interactive functionality that enables court users to transact business without the necessity of appearing in person.
Strategy C	Branch Courts	Promote the expansion of and types of court services offered in the branch courts as a convenience and to improve accessibility by the public and the Bar.
Strategy D	Signage	Promote accessibility of court facilities by continually improving signage, directories, displays of calendars and receptionist services.
Strategy E	Technology	Effective use of technology to make the services of the court more accessible, secure, convenient to use and cost effective.
Strategy F	Training & Education	Continue and expand training of judges and court staff to promote improved customer service, technical skills, and professional development.
Strategy G	Caseflow Management	Improve caseflow and reduce delay by implementing the caseflow management plan.
Strategy H	Self-Representation	Improve services and programs to assist self-represented litigants.
Strategy I	Court Forms	Improve court forms and procedures to promote ease of use by judges, court staff, the public, and the Bar.
Strategy J	Collaboration	Collaborate with stakeholders, ancillary justice agencies and private support providers to ensure that judges have sufficient information to make informed decisions.
Strategy K	Communication	Continually improve external communications, especially with the public, the Bar, funding agencies and justice partners.
Strategy L	Cost of Litigation	Contain the cost of litigation and court services to ensure equal access.
Strategy M	Service Delivery	Continually improve court operations and service delivery of the judicial branch.

However, courts might generally be seen in either philosophical or historical terms, the primary purpose of a judicial system is to provide a service function within society. Essentially courts are created to serve basic human needs in contemporary society; and they cannot serve this purpose on sentiment, tradition, or folklore, but rather through planning, implementing, and reporting accomplishments. Judges are, of course, the cornerstone of the judicial system, but courts cannot fully accomplish their

purpose without the necessary staff that are engaged and motivated to provide outstanding services to the courts and to the public. Court administrative staff includes probation officers, juvenile counselors, court reporters, court clerks, security personnel, and scores of other tremendously talented individuals who perform essential functions within the judicial system.

Success in implementing the strategic plan requires focus and perseverance on the part of all of the court's judicial and administrative leadership and of all staff. As a blueprint for the future, successful strategic planning depends on assuring that the court's fiscal and human resources, as well as judicial, administrative and operational decisions, are aligned with the court's planned direction and priorities. In order to ensure that the Strategic Plan remains a vibrant blueprint for the Circuit Court of Lake County in the years ahead, it is important to maintain: 1) communication and support for the plan, 2) involvement of many judges, managers and staff in the Court's strategic initiatives/programs/activities, 3) regular monitoring of progress on the Court's strategic initiatives/programs/activities, and 4) review and modification of the Strategic Plan at least annually and/or as conditions warrant. Strategic planning helps courts and court leaders avoid isolation, create and maintain momentum for change, and improve day-to-day court functioning - impacting the court's bottom line – **promoting public trust and confidence.**

Court leaders must actively develop and promote a strategic vision for the court organization by establishing a strategic course, communicating that direction to internal and external stakeholders and engaging them to work collaboratively toward achieving the court organization's mission. Annually, organizational directors provide an accounting of the accomplishments completed within their respective divisions in support of the current strategic plan. **During the most recent strategic planning period (2009-13), court staff have participated in a total of 692 initiatives associated with the strategic plan.** The chart below provides a snapshot of the number of accomplishments (by year) completed as a result of the actions of all functional divisions of the court organization.



Has strategic planning worked in the Circuit Court of Lake County?

This is an interesting question, even if (and perhaps because) it does not have a definite answer. This is true for a number of reasons.

- 1) The functional divisions of court administration operate with limited degrees of freedom. The Strategic Plan does not present a comprehensive list of all activities that may be undertaken by the divisions of the court organization; rather, **it is revised and updated based on evolving needs, emerging issues and available resources**. In addition to their respective job duties based on their scope of operations, each division may be assigned special projects. These special assignments are typically based on immediate needs facing the court organization (targets of opportunity) and may be only loosely associated with the strategies embodied within the strategic plan.
- 2) As in most other courts, most of the circuit's operating budget represents its permanent commitments to programs and personnel that continue from year to year. Salaries and related benefits alone encompass the bulk of the court's general budget. Consequently, innovation and new projects in support of the strategic plan may need to be shelved in favor of existing obligations.
- 3) Changes in the availability of resources (both financial and human) can, and often do, occur through essentially formulaic allocations that must respond to changing case filings and probation client need patterns rather than discretionary strategic choices. The availability of resources is sometimes impacted in sudden and unexpected ways. For example, during 2009, due to faltering tax revenues and filing fees and state reimbursement, the court organization announced a freeze in filing positions, training and new program requests. This significantly affected not only the number of accomplishments recorded that year, but also normal court operations.
- 4) All strategy areas have equal importance, but not necessarily the same number of associated projects. For example, a long-term, labor-intensive project to enhance the website for public users and development of an in-house training event would each be credited as a single accomplishment, despite the discrepant effort associated with the project.

Despite the aforementioned constraints, several strategy areas stand out in terms of the number of associated accomplishments. As noted above, however, the raw number of accomplishments is not indicative of the effort or importance associated with any given strategy area, but does provide some measure of the attention that strategy was given by divisions throughout the court organization. The top-four strategy areas are noted below; together, these strategies account for 62.7% of all accomplishments recorded during this strategic planning period.

- Strategy F: **Training & Education**
125 Accomplishments (18.1% of all accomplishments)
- Strategy E: **Technology**
116 Accomplishments (16.8% of all accomplishments)
- Strategy K: **Communication**
99 Accomplishments (14.3% of all accomplishments)
- Strategy M: **Service Delivery**
94 Accomplishments (13.6% of all accomplishments)



The current strategic plan and all annual accomplishment reports are public documents. Copies of the 2009 Strategic Plan² and annual accomplishments³ are available on the court’s website and on request through the Office of the Chief Judge or from court administration. The table below summarizes the number of accomplishments recorded organization-wide by year and strategy area.

² Booras, J. K., et al (2009). *Strategic Plan of the Nineteenth Judicial Circuit – Circuit Court of Lake County, Illinois*. Waukegan, IL: Circuit Court of Lake County. Retrieved from:

http://19thcircuitcourt.state.il.us/resources/Documents/Reports/StrategicPlan09_112111.pdf

³ 19th Judicial Circuit - Circuit Court of Lake County (2009 – 13). *Strategic Plan Task Update*. Waukegan, IL: Circuit Court of Lake County. Retrieved from:

- 2009 Accomplishments
http://19thcircuitcourt.state.il.us/resources/Documents/Smaart/Accomplishments_2009.pdf
- 2010 Accomplishments
http://19thcircuitcourt.state.il.us/resources/Documents/Smaart/Accomplishments_2010_01012011-v2.pdf
- 2011 Accomplishments
<http://19thcircuitcourt.state.il.us/resources/Documents/Smaart/StrategicPlanAccomplishments2011.pdf>
- 2012 Accomplishments
http://19thcircuitcourt.state.il.us/resources/Documents/Smaart/Accomplishments_2012.pdf
- 2013 Accomplishments: *In Press*

2009 STRATEGIC PLAN ACCOMPLISHMENTS (2009-13)							
Strategy Area	Strategic Focus	Year					Total
		2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	
Strategy A	Facilities	6	5	2	8	4	25
Strategy B	Website	3	1	4	0	2	10
Strategy C	Branch Courts	4	3	5	4	1	17
Strategy D	Signage	1	4	6	2	3	16
Strategy E	Technology	16	27	16	23	34	116
Strategy F	Training & Education	10	21	23	42	29	125
Strategy G	Caseflow Management	2	6	13	7	3	31
Strategy H	Self-Represented	1	7	4	6	4	22
Strategy I	Court Forms	5	8	16	8	13	50
Strategy J	Collaboration	9	15	11	7	11	53
Strategy K	Communication	10	19	26	27	17	99
Strategy L	Cost of Litigation	8	4	6	8	8	34
Strategy M	Service Delivery	10	28	18	22	16	94
Total		85	148	150	164	145	692

These accomplishments reflect the strong leadership at the highest levels of the court organization. Annually, the directors of each of the functional divisions (Administrative Services, Adult Probation Services, Judicial Information & Technology, Judicial Operations, Juvenile Probation & Detention Services, and Psychological Services) provide input to the accomplishments report. Not all of these accomplishments, however, are solely due to strategic planning. Many important achievements over the past several years have been consistent with, rather than a product of, strategic planning. These **targets of opportunity** reflect the intuitive nature of the most recent strategic planning process, which anticipates those societal and community issues that are most likely to influence the court organization, rather than dictating what those issues should be and where they fit within the context of the trial court performance standards.

Additionally, many of the achievements noted in the Accomplishments Reports are not the product of a single division. Being a unified court organization, each of the divisions is more likely to work in unison with the others than singularly. In 2014, each of the division directors was asked to review the accomplishment reports of the previous five years and indicate whether their respective division played an active role in the planning, delivery or reporting of each of the accomplishments. This exercise revealed that 258 (37.3%) accomplishments involved only a single division; a large majority of projects (434 or 62.7%) involved two or more divisions, and 20 projects involved all six divisions. These findings reflect the cooperation that exists among the various divisions of court administration; albeit the divisions with the greatest percentage of shared projects were the traditional core support units: Administrative Services and Judicial Information & Technology.

- **Division of Administrative Services/Core Support**
(Includes Judicial Research Unit and Legal Research Unit)
 - Number of Projects Involved: 286 (41.3% of Organizational Accomplishments)
 - Number of Solo Projects: 13 (4.5% of Divisional Accomplishments)
 - Number of Shared Projects: 273 (95.5% of Divisional Accomplishments)

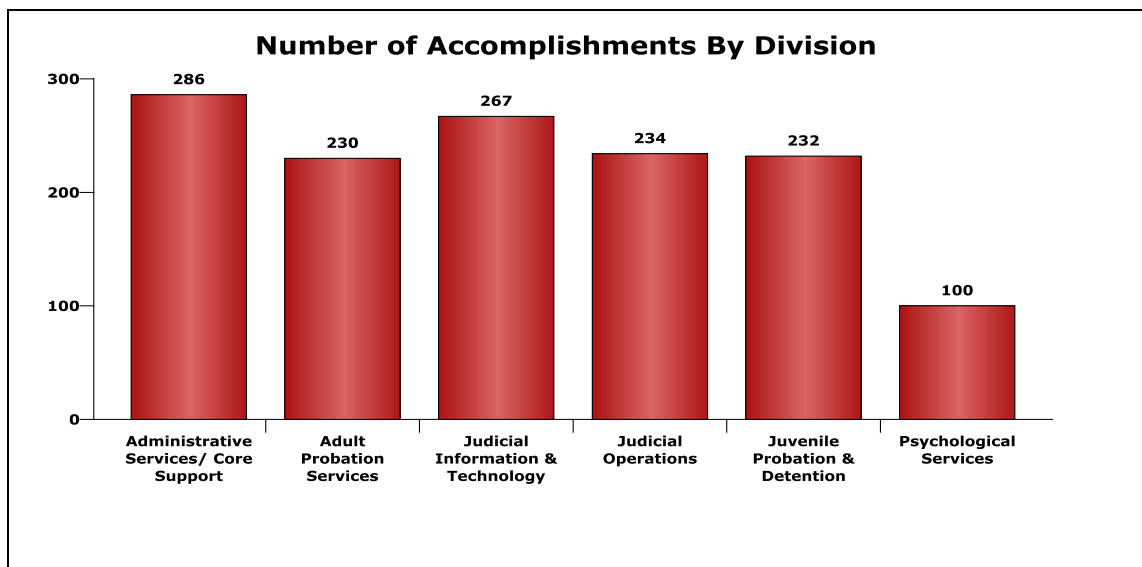
- **Division of Adult Probation Services**
 - Number of Projects Involved: 230 (33.2% of Organizational Accomplishments)
 - Number of Solo Projects: 78 (33.9% of Divisional Accomplishments)
 - Number of Shared Projects: 152 (66.1% of Divisional Accomplishments)

- **Judicial Information and Technology Services**
 - Number of Projects Involved: 267 (38.6% of Organizational Accomplishments)
 - Number of Solo Projects: 31 (11.6% of Divisional Accomplishments)
 - Number of Shared Projects: 236 (88.4% of Divisional Accomplishments)

- **Division of Judicial Operations**
 - Number of Projects Involved: 234 (33.8% of Organizational Accomplishments)
 - Number of Solo Projects: 58 (24.8% of Divisional Accomplishments)
 - Number of Shared Projects: 174 (75.2% of Divisional Accomplishments)

- **Division of Juvenile Probation and Detention Services**
 - Number of Projects Involved: 232 (33.5% of Organizational Accomplishments)
 - Number of Solo Projects: 71 (30.6% of Divisional Accomplishments)
 - Number of Shared Projects: 161 (69.4% of Divisional Accomplishments)

- **Division of Psychological Services**
 - Number of Projects Involved: 100 (14.5% of Organizational Accomplishments)
 - Number of Solo Projects: 7 (7.0% of Divisional Accomplishments)
 - Number of Shared Projects: 93 (93.0% of Divisional Accomplishments)

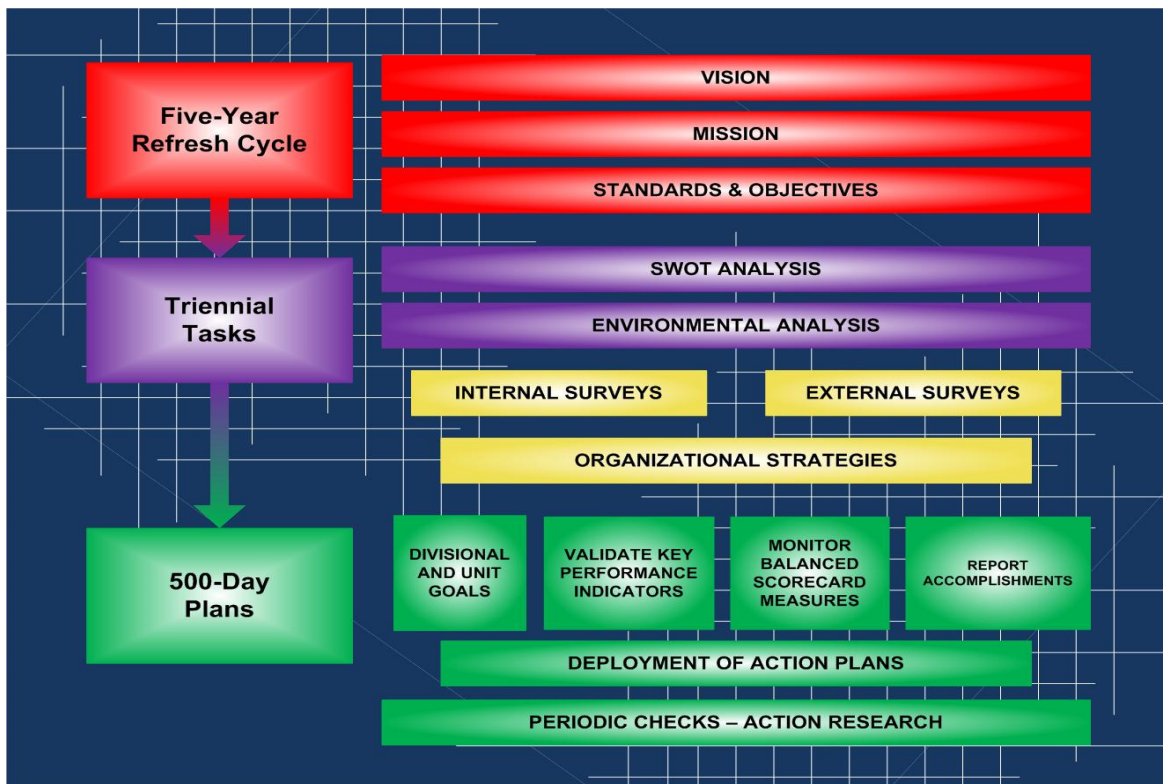


Conclusion

The Strategic Plan as a whole is reviewed annually with specific initiatives evaluated and expanded, amended or modified, or discontinued as necessary based on the success of the initiative in delivering positive results (impact assessment) and the cost of the initiative (both financial and human) compared to its perceived benefits (cost-benefit analysis). This flexibility assures the Court that:

- Decisions are based on the best interests of the public and the court system as a whole.
- Business is based on an underlying commitment to equal and timely justice and to public access to an independent forum for the resolution of disputes.
- The continued development of an accessible, independent court system is ensured through planning, research and evaluation of programs and through the use of modern management approaches and technological developments.

Over the past three strategic planning cycles, we have learned that when approached correctly, an integrated (e.g., entire court organization) strategic planning process can drive sustained success at all levels of the court organization. Careful planning and attention to societal trends can provide a line of sight that helps the court organization evolve into a strategically focused organization. Strategic Planning links a shared vision of the future with executable objectives and performance measures that improve operating results and inspires organizational growth. The Strategic Plan serves as a roadmap to be more proactive and address opportunities or challenges in a constantly changing environment, and provides a blueprint for divisions and support units looking to expand services, or a catalyst for program growth to achieve greater positive results. The following graphic depicts the development and monitoring process for the Strategic Plan of the Circuit Court of Lake County:



Strategic planning in the Circuit Court of Lake County has been a continuous process since 1996, but has evolved in important ways. The court organization has gradually, but very definitely, shifted away from a one-size-fits-all requirement (very first plan) and toward more flexible and focused approaches to strategic planning. The annual action planning and budgeting cycle continues for all divisions and supporting units. However, within that cycle, support units at key transition points may engage in a relatively intense assessment and improvement process. Some of the more noteworthy events that have influenced our conception of and approach towards strategic planning in the Circuit Court of Lake County include:

- The court organization in 2000 committed to the principles of Continuous Quality Improvement, which included the development of key performance indicators and performance benchmarks. These efforts were largely concentrated on the Trial Court Performance Standards and provided the basis for our Performance Measurement process (*SMAART, Mk. I*).
- In 2007, the Circuit Court of Lake County took steps to explicitly link quality, planning and assessment; those steps included the merger of leadership and support responsibilities into a balanced scorecard methodology, a more deliberate incorporation of quality improvement. Also, considerable attention and energy was focused on the development of action plans – a clearly defined process of planning, delivering and reporting the results of initiatives that support the goals and objectives of the strategic plan. This process transformed the information-based performance measurement system into a continuous-improvement-based performance management program (*SMAART, Mk. II*).
- In 2009, the court organization began producing an annual report of strategic performance indicators and accomplishments.
- In the 2009 Strategic Plan, the court moved to a five-year window for next cycle of the strategic planning process; the thinking is that a defined planning horizon is more beneficial to positive outcomes and responds proactively to emergent conditions affecting the court organization.
- In 2011, the court organization incorporated very deliberate budget recycling process – zero-based budgeting; this provided both incentives and a means to reallocate resources from across all administrative activities toward more evidence-based functions.
- Now, each division is asked to describe how it will internally repurpose some portion of its operating budget each year – that is, redirect money to the highest priorities within the division or support unit.

To paraphrase an analogy from Brian Quinn (cited in Peters 1994⁴), *"A good deal of strategic planning ... is like a ritual rain dance. It has no effect on the weather that follows, but those who engage in it think it does. ... Moreover, much of the advice related to strategic planning is directed at improving the dancing, not the weather."* No one can prove whether this court organization (or any other court organization) is more or less successful because of strategic planning than it would be without it. Nonetheless, the evidence of the Circuit Court of Lake County experience does suggest that the Court's long term commitment to strategic planning – clearly defined in its broad parameters, but flexible and adaptive in its details – has been extremely productive.

⁴ Peters, T. (1994). *The Pursuit of Wow!* New York: Vintage Books.