

MANY PATHS TOWARD A COLLECTIVE STRATEGIC PLAN

When it was time to renew its planning efforts, the Superior Court of San Mateo County went far beyond the confines of the court. Its Strategic Planning Committee began a multifaceted effort

to connect with the community. The committee is made up of three judges, the court executive officer, the deputy court executive officers, managers, and other members of the court's staff. Then Presiding Judge George A. Miram and then Assistant Presiding Judge Robert D. Foiles asked the committee to review the court's current strategic plan and to develop new goals and initiatives to guide the court in planning and decisionmaking. Through various communication channels, the court asked its constituents two questions: What is the court doing well? And what can it do better?

With the guidance of its Strategic Planning Committee, the court took the following steps to get the maximum feedback from the public and its justice system partners:

- ▶ Held four forums open to the public with Mandarin, Cantonese, Spanish, and Tagalog interpreters.
- ▶ Placed ads in seven local newspapers, including the largest daily Chinese newspaper, to announce public forums.
- ▶ Launched online surveys, which allowed the public to provide feedback on general court services and in the areas of jury and traffic.
- ▶ Sent letters to 60,000 jurors, asking them to participate in the online survey for jury service.
- ▶ Invited the San Mateo Bar Association, minority bar associations, the Office of the District Attorney, the Office of the Public Defender, business leaders, law enforcement, and the leadership of various county departments to five focus group meetings.
- ▶ Held another six focus groups solely for court employees.
- ▶ Arranged for the assistant presiding judge and another judge to appear on a community-access cable TV news show.
- ▶ Coordinated the appearance of two judges on a local radio show that focuses on individuals' legal rights.

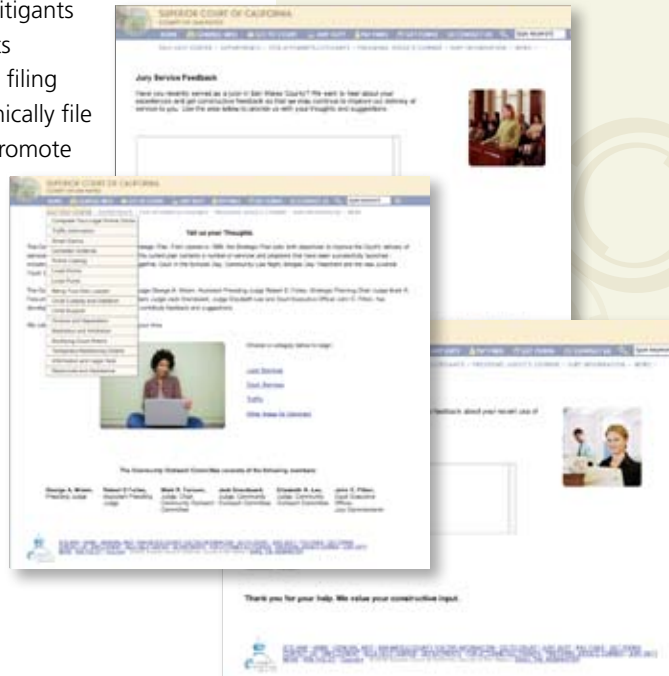
- Utilized the CourTools system, provided by the National Center for State Courts, to evaluate public perceptions of court access and fairness.

Between face-to-face contact, surveys, and online feedback, nearly 1,500 people contributed to the court's planning process.

The most immediate action the court took was to report back to the community participants after the completion of the strategic plan. Everyone who attended a public forum or focus group either received a copy of the plan or was directed to the online version at the court's Web site. Participants were able to see that their feedback had been included and had factored into some of the court's priority actions.

Working from constituent suggestions to improve services, the court has already created a way for litigants and attorneys to request court transcripts online. It also hopes to expand its online filing capability, so that the public can electronically file criminal matters; increase its efforts to promote alternative dispute resolution; and improve its Web site and other court communications to make them more accessible to constituents who speak languages other than English.

To maintain the relationships it has built, the court plans to survey court users at least once a year, post quarterly updates of the strategic plan on the Web site, and provide city councils with regular updates about court developments.



The Superior Court of San Mateo County launched a series of online surveys to get feedback from the public about the public's general experiences with the court and more specific information about jury service and traffic court.