

STRATEGIC PLAN FOR THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE DISTRICT OF NEBRASKA

I. INTRODUCTION

This is the strategic plan for the United States District Court for the District of Nebraska. The plan was adopted on August 30, 2006¹.

II. STRATEGIC PLANNING: THE DEFINITION, NEED AND CONTEXT

Strategic planning is a process by which the guiding members of an organization imagine its future and develop the necessary procedures and operations to achieve that future. We believe that aspects of the future can be influenced and changed by what we do now, and we can do more than plan for the future. We can help our court create its future.

Most of us, because we are under such enormous daily pressure, tend to focus on the small and the immediate. We have little time to think about potentially big and important changes. We must be able to think about “big things” while we are doing “small things,” so the “small things” go in the right direction. Thus, we need to plan strategically.

III. OUR VALUES

The United States District Court for the District of Nebraska has several core values. A core value is what we want to become and stay; a core value is intrinsic to our organization and will not be affected as trends and environment change; a core value transcends individual judges, current practices, and management fads; a core value is authentic, that is, it is discovered and not created.

Our core values are these:

- Integrity
- Impartiality
- Quality
- Civility
- Timely decision-making

¹The court’s first strategic plan was adopted on July 27, 1999, and can be found at <http://www.ned.uscourts.gov/internetDocs/stratplan/1999.pdf>.

- Principled decision-making
- Competent decision-making
- Accessibility
- Responsiveness
- Flexibility
- Economical operation
- Stewardship of public funds

IV. OUR MISSION: THE CENTRAL PURPOSE OF OUR COURT

The court's mission describes its fundamental reason for existence; inspires and directs change; connects and motivates people; and serves as a reference point for the strategic planning process. It does not vary over time, although the court may have to change its practices in order to pursue it fully.

The United States District Court for the District of Nebraska exists to maintain and perpetuate a law-abiding society by preserving the rule of law through just and orderly resolution of disputes.

V. TREND ANALYSIS AND STAKEHOLDER EXPECTATIONS

While the vision and mission of the court remain constant, the manner in which the court fulfills its purpose is influenced greatly by emerging trends in the external environment and the changing expectations of its internal and external stakeholders.

The identification of emerging trends includes a continual review of political mandates; economic conditions; social values; and technical advancements. We view these trends as opportunities, not as threats. We will identify trends and analyze implications of each trend every three years.

The court does not exist to serve itself. Rather, the court exists to serve "stakeholders" who are the users, both external and internal, of the resources of the court. The court's stakeholders are Congress, the public, the media, jurors, civil lawyers, criminal lawyers, civil litigants, criminal defendants, judges, and court employees. We will gather stakeholder feedback every three years.

VI. CRITICAL FUNCTIONS AND KEY RESULT AREAS

A critical function is one that is central to fulfilling the mission of the court, and an area where the court cannot afford to fail. The court's critical functions are these:

- (1) Adjudication and case management;
- (2) Records management;
- (3) Dissemination of information;
- (4) Jury management;
- (5) Investigation and supervision of defendants and convicted offenders;
- (6) Administrative management; and
- (7) Education.

Every three years, we will review our critical functions and identify key results areas for each function. A key result area is an area of organizational behavior where superior performance will produce outstanding results for one or more priority stakeholder.

VII. PRIORITY GOALS AND MEASURES OF SUCCESS

We agree that our court will never be greater than the vision that guides us. Nevertheless, that vision must be coupled with hard work. We understand that our options do not include the status quo. We can either change or be changed. As a consequence, every three years, we will review the key result areas for each critical function, develop BHAGs (Big, Hairy, Audacious Goals) consistent with our vision and mission, and set criteria by which successful completion of each goal will be measured. BHAGs 1) engage people and grab them in the gut; 2) are goals, not statements; 3) challenge the status quo; 4) require little or no explanation; 5) are consistent with the vision and mission; 6) are measurable; and 7) are elevating.

VIII. IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

We believe strategic planning is an ongoing process and not a one-time event. We are not perfect, but we strive for excellence. Every three years, we will develop an action plan for each priority goal to successfully translate the priority goals into reality. The action plan will include the following: 1) identification of the court's relative strengths and weaknesses in relationship to what is required to achieve each goal; 2) the opportunities and threats in our court, which will either support or inhibit our ability to achieve the goal; 3) the basic strategy or approach which will be used to achieve the goal; 4) two or three of the most critical action steps which will need to be taken to initiate implementation of the basic strategy; 5) the target date for the achievement of the goal; and 6) goal manager(s) – the person or group accountable for managing the implementation process.

IX. EVALUATION AND MONITORING

We recognize that we must continually evaluate and monitor our progress. Each year in July, we will discuss the current status of each outstanding goal. We will track our progress of past and present goals.² In addition, goal managers may provide status reports and seek advice from the judges and court unit executives during the Nebraska Judicial Council's quarterly meetings.

We recognize that policies must be set by policy makers, but that specific solutions will likely come from our employees. As a result, we will keep our employees updated on the progress of our goals. In addition, every third year, we will meet with all of our employees to discuss our goals and enthusiasm for them. For this plan to succeed, we must have the active support of our employees.

X. SUMMARY

Strategic planning is an ongoing process, and we will 1) focus on results, not activities; compare actual to intended (and unintended) outcomes; 2) keep the purpose firm and the plan flexible; 3) communicate and celebrate meaningful achievements on a routine basis; 4) demonstrate our commitment to the process and use the plan in key management decisions; and 5) test the assumptions underlying the plan and track the trends.

Essentially, we have committed to a race without a finish line.

² See *Goals Summary* at <http://www.ned.uscourts.gov/plans-and-policies/strategic-planning>.