



Supreme Court of Appeals
West Virginia:

Strategic Plan

NOVEMBER 2023

PREPARED BY

blue sky partners



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Letter from the Chief

I am thrilled to share with you the first strategic plan for West Virginia's judiciary. The areas of need and goals were first identified through focus groups with representative court users from across the state and over 1,850 individual survey responses. Because courts encounter and address a variety of issues every day, we took care to consider a wide range of viewpoints as we discussed and refined this plan.

With the assistance and facilitation of Blue Sky Partners, the Strategic Planning Committee worked during the past year to deliver this thoughtful vision for West Virginia's courts. Through this formal, documented commitment, my hope is that we will continue to improve services to the public, lawyers, and other state and local constituents; embrace an innovative work culture for staff; and expand information-sharing from our vital and independent branch of government.

The Court intends for this document to frame a long-term vision for the judicial branch that will periodically be revised to reflect future conditions and needs. I hope this strategic plan fosters a spirit of cooperation to develop specific initiatives to better the state judiciary. Some of this work will be difficult, but I am confident that West Virginia's state courts are worth the effort.

– **Chief Justice Beth Walker**



This strategic plan was developed under a 2022 technical assistance grant from the State Justice Institute. The points of view expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the State Justice Institute.

Strategic Planning Process

As the Supreme Court of Appeals West Virginia plans for the next 3-5 years, Blue Sky Partners was engaged to lead a strategic planning process. The following Strategic Plan was created through the gathering of stakeholder feedback, research, and work groups. The general strategic planning process is further outlined in this document.

The strategic planning process begins with the formation of the Strategic Planning Committee (SPC), composed of members selected by SCAWV leadership to guide the process. Stakeholders were engaged through surveys, and subsequent focus groups were conducted to identify key strategic priorities. Blue Sky Partners delivered a comprehensive Survey Summary report, summarizing all survey data. The next step in the process was the delivery of a Themes Report, which consolidated information from focus groups and surveys, and proposed potential strategic priorities.

Blue Sky Partners then facilitated sessions with leadership and the SPC to finalize the priorities. From there, work groups were established to develop actionable and measurable goals, strategies, objectives, metrics, and tactics surrounding each strategic priority. All of these activities are further outlined in this report, and resulted in the development of the final Strategic Plan.



Strategic Planning Committee

The Strategic Planning Committee consists of:

- **Chief Justice Beth Walker**
- **Nicole Cofer**, Director of Magistrate Court Services
- **April Harless**, Deputy Public Information Officer
- **Cindy Hill**, Director, Division of Children & Juvenile Services
- **Keith Hoover**, Deputy Administrative Director & Counsel
- **Evan Lynch**, Deputy Administrative Director
- **Senior Status Judge Alan Moats**

Meetings

Blue Sky Partners conducted planning meetings on the following dates with the SCAWV Strategic Planning Committee (SPC).

- April 13, 2023
- May 3, 2023
- June 14, 2023
- November 9, 2023

Document Review

Blue Sky Partners requested organizational documents from SCAWV to provide context and to inform this Themes Report. The documents received and reviewed by Blue Sky Partners can be found in Appendix A.

Stakeholder Survey

Blue Sky Partners conducted a comprehensive survey on behalf of the Supreme Court of Appeals West Virginia (SCAWV) to gather opinions regarding the current state of the West Virginia Judiciary and the SCAWV. The survey, which was statistically meaningful, was distributed to various stakeholders, including court staff, the West Virginia State Bar, CASA, the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources, and Law Enforcement. A total of 1,865 individuals responded to all or a portion of the survey, which consisted of over 20 questions. Survey respondents can be categorized in the following way:

- **Court Staff**- 865 responses
- **Attorneys**- 777 responses
- **DHHR/Youth Staff**- 127 responses
- **Law Enforcement**- 54 responses
- **CASA**- 44 responses

The survey responses were collected anonymously, with no request or requirement for participants to provide personal identifying information. Survey respondents were asked to identify themselves as either Court Staff, Attorneys, CASA, DHHR/Youth Staff, or law enforcement. Based on this identification, they received a specific set of questions that were tailored to their specific role. In addition to these role-based questions, all survey respondents also received a group of questions that were asked to everyone, regardless of their role. The survey, conducted from June 1 to June 13, 2023, provides a snapshot of opinions at a specific moment. Blue Sky Partners provided an exhaustive summary of survey data to the SCAWV on July 7, 2023. See Appendix B for a link to the Survey Summary.

Focus Groups

Blue Sky Partners conducted four in-person focus groups with 29 total individuals between June 21-23, 2023. The themes of the four focus groups were Juvenile, Family, Criminal, and Civil groups. The focus groups were made up of advocacy organizations, attorneys, nonprofits, businesses, and other community stakeholders. Each focus group met for 2 hours, and all participants will remain anonymous for the purposes of this report and strategic planning process. Questions for the focus groups (found in Appendix C) were prepared ahead of time, following a preliminary review of survey data.

Facilitated Sessions

Two facilitated sessions were conducted on August 10, 2023 and August 22, 2023. These groups were comprised of Justices, members of the SPC, and court staff. During these sessions, Blue Sky Partners led participants through a series of facilitated activities to determine the final strategic priority areas for the Strategic Plan. As a result of these sessions, the following strategic priority areas were determined:

- **Judicial Branch Leadership for State's Challenges**
- **Efficiency and Public Service**
- **Staff Development, Culture, and Well-being**
- **Public Confidence, Information, and Access**

Work Groups

Following the facilitated sessions, four workgroups were held, one for each of the strategic priority areas, on the following dates:

- **Staff Development, Culture, and Well-being:** September 29, 2023
- **Efficiency and Public Service:** October 2, 2023
- **Public Confidence, Information, and Access:** October 2, 2023
- **Judicial Branch Leadership for State's Challenges:** October 3, 2023

Each group was made up of 7-10 Justices and court staff who were selected to participate in each group based on their particular skill set or area of influence. Blue Sky Partners facilitated activities in these workgroups to determine possible goals, strategies, tactics, and metrics for each strategic priority area.

Final Strategic Plan

Based on all of the above listed activities, Blue Sky Partners drafted a strategic plan that contains strategic priority areas, strategic statements, goals, and high-level strategies. This plan was reviewed by the SPC and necessary adjustments were made. Further work groups will be conducted internally by the SCAWV to determine tactics and metrics for each area. This plan is designed to be dynamic, with the ability to adjust as issues evolve.

Implementing the Strategic Plan

This final plan does not represent the end of the strategic planning process as a whole. As mentioned above, the SCAWV will be working further to develop specific tactics and metrics for each strategic priority area. Further work groups will be convened internally in order to lay out an actionable plan to achieve each strategic priority area. Detailing the tactics, metrics, and resources needed will be crucial in ensuring the overall success of the strategic plan. Part of this process will include determining which goals and strategies already have tasks that are currently underway, which goals and strategies are achievable in the short-term, and which ones will require a more long-term approach. Blue Sky Partners has provided the judiciary with materials that will set the foundation for this process, as work groups have already spent some time brainstorming tactics and metrics for each goal and strategy area. In many ways, the finalization of this plan is really the start of the SCAWV's strategic planning work.

Definitions

We provide the following definitions for terms that will be used throughout this report:

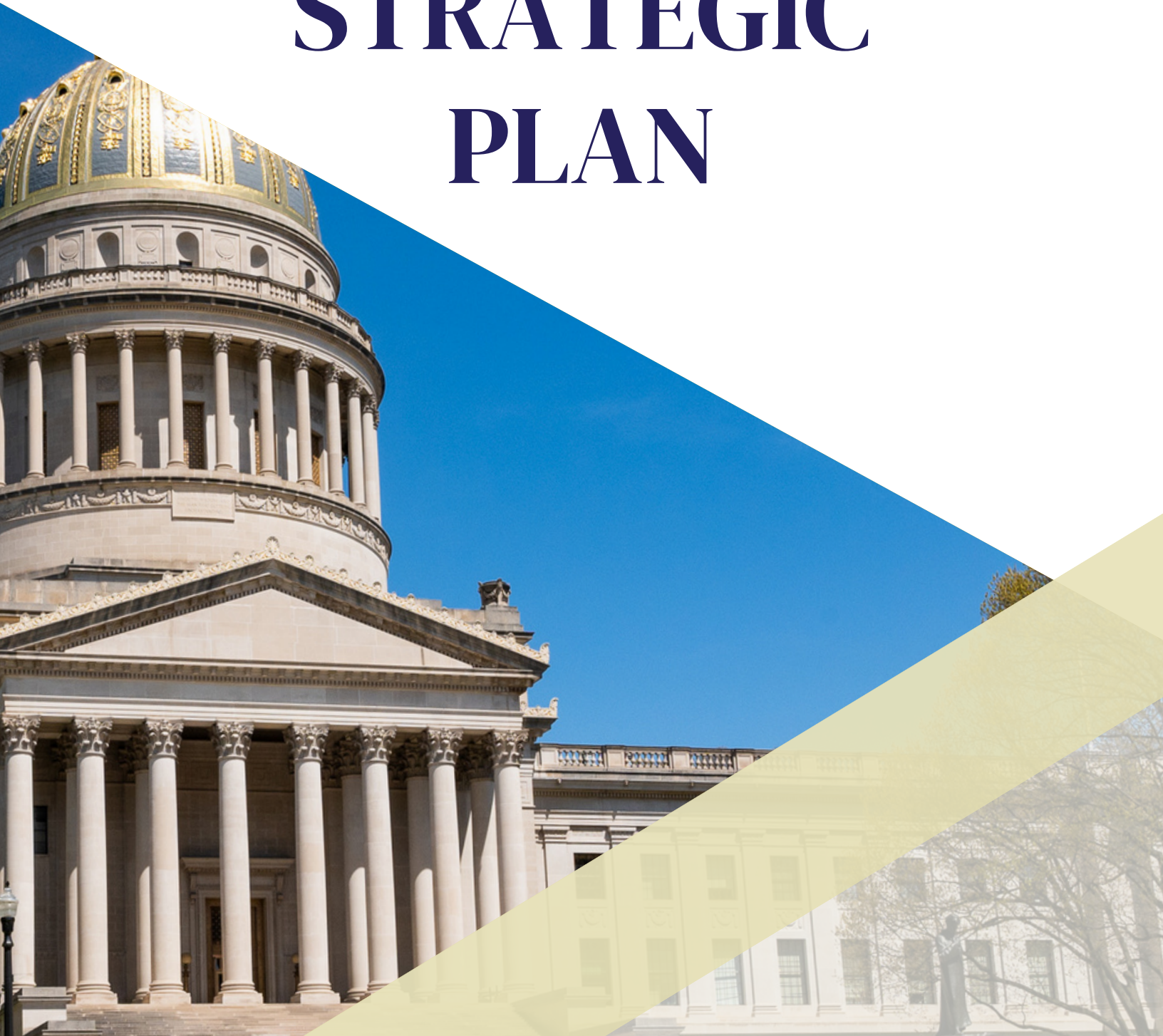
Strategic Priorities: The essential focus areas and long-term directions that the SCAWV will aim to address through the strategic planning process. These priorities guide decision-making and resource allocation to achieve the court's objectives effectively.

Goals: Broad, high-level aspirations that align with the strategic priorities and represent the desired outcomes the SCAWV seeks to achieve. Goals provide a clear direction and framework for the strategic priorities.

Strategies: Comprehensive and intentional plans of action designed to accomplish the established goals. Strategies will outline the approach, steps, and key activities that the SCAWV will undertake to make progress towards its goals.



STRATEGIC PLAN





INTRODUCTION

Below is a section-by-section breakdown of strategic priorities and strategic statements. These are followed by comprehensive goal statements and headline strategies. The goals outlined in this strategic plan are presented without any specific prioritization. The goals are listed without any specific order to highlight how they are all connected and collectively contribute to achieving our main strategic objectives. Each goal is considered valuable and contributes uniquely to the overall goals of the judiciary, allowing for flexibility and adaptability in the implementation process.



JUDICIAL BRANCH LEADERSHIP FOR STATE'S CHALLENGES

Strategy Statement: Strengthen collaboration with community partners and other branches of government to address statewide challenges impacting courts such as the behavioral health and substance abuse disorder crises, child welfare, and disparate resources in different areas of the state.

Goal:

Ensure the development and evaluation of quality resources by conducting a benchmark analysis and exploring new funding and data opportunities.

Strategies:

- Benchmark and assess the current landscape as it relates to mental health and addiction services, as well as other community resources, in order to evaluate where the greatest needs are
- Increase funding and data opportunities to grow treatment and support options throughout the state to adequately meet the needs of specific areas
- Collaborate with West Virginia First Foundation to ensure sustainability of judicial branch led treatment efforts

Goal:

Enhance the quality of legal representation and overall process for child abuse and neglect and juvenile matters.

Strategies:

- Arrange for more opportunities for legislative engagement at the state and local levels in order to increase understanding and collaboration
- Increase collaboration with community entities to improve services offered by the court
- Develop communication efforts and increase education surrounding issues related to the juvenile justice system

Goal:

With a focus on external communication, strengthen intergovernmental relations and create new community collaborations to provide opportunities for information/data sharing and education.

Strategies:

- Improve case management procedures in order to enhance the quality of legal representation
- Boost collaboration between parties and increase opportunities for training related to child abuse and neglect
- Study judiciary's role and responsibility in ensuring quality legal representation in juvenile justice system



EFFICIENCY & PUBLIC SERVICE

Strategy Statement: Maximize the West Virginia Judiciary’s ability to serve the public by strategically evaluating emerging technology, current systems, and data analytics to improve efficiency, transparency, and accountability.

Goal:

Make sure court staff¹ have access to the technologies and innovative tools/equipment necessary to excel in their roles.

Strategies:

- Improve access to technology and connectivity for staff to excel in their roles
- Monitor national technology trends and developments to incorporate the most recent advances in West Virginia

¹ For the purposes of this document, Court Staff refers to all individuals working within the judicial branch in West Virginia, including county employees, such as circuit clerks and bailiffs that are assigned to work for judicial officers as part of their regular job duties.

Goal:

Enhance public access to information from the courts through technological advancements and integration into processes.

Strategies:

- Increase efficiency through the use of unified technology
- Continue to seek funding and grant opportunities to support the use of technology
- Enhance judicial transparency through the use of technology and public availability of accurate, current, and cumulative statistics and data trends

Goal:

Improve the quality and accuracy of data and increase efficiency of data entry with the goal of providing easily accessible information to the public and others.

Strategies:

- Improve data quality and efficiency through emerging technologies and unified data standards
- Use technology to streamline case management processes and provide accountability

Goal:

Strengthen the skills of all court employees through a comprehensive program with available resources for judges, extensive staff training, and accessible training delivery options.

Strategies:

- Expand judicial education and knowledge sharing
- Develop more staff training and resources, specifically for staff who are working directly for an elected judicial officer



STAFF DEVELOPMENT, CULTURE, & WELL-BEING

Strategy Statement: Improve court administration with innovative human resources leadership in areas such as recruitment and retention, staff development and well-being, and distribution of necessary work equipment and other tools.

Goal:

Cultivate a work environment that supports employee health and well-being, with a focus on incentives, professional development, and staff engagement.

Strategies:

- Augment internal well-being and health initiatives, with an emphasis on secondary trauma
- Evaluate compensation and non-compensation incentives for employees
- Develop and track caseload models to ensure equitable distribution of work assignments
- Institute professional development and continuing education opportunities that reflect staff's desires, current needs, and emerging issues
- Increase staff communication channels to create a forum for exchange of ideas between staff and management

Goal:

Optimize recruitment of talented Court Staff through new partnerships, targeted search efforts in the community, and fostering a reputation for the court as an outstanding workplace.

Strategies:

- Increase academic partnerships and presence in the community to diversify and expand staff recruitment pool
- Evaluate hiring processes in order to attract new talent

Goal:

Retain talented Court Staff by enhanced opportunities for advancement, employee recognition, and other non monetary benefits.

Strategies:

- Design opportunities for employee recognition and appreciation
- Consistently offer training and development opportunities to support employees in onboarding and in continuous growth, including management training
- Embrace a workplace based on flexibility and efficiency

Goal:

Elevate Human Resources through increased communication, the creation of performance evaluations and incentives, and increasing efficiency and automation of systems.

Strategies:

- Establish a Human Resources Department that is fully staffed to adequately address all staff needs statewide
- Enhance communication and feedback loops between Human Resources and staff to ensure information is communicated consistently and transparently
- Develop mechanisms for measuring employee performance and incentives
- Focus on areas for process improvement and automation to ensure efficiency in Human Resources

Goal:

Evaluate current health and safety needs to continually assess risks, implement controls, and update policies to prevent accidents and injuries, and ensure employees and court system users have access to healthy, safe, and secure workplaces.

Strategies:

- Study collaboration opportunities and leadership responsibilities between divisions to support a multi-faceted focus on workplace health, safety, and security
- Create system of evaluations and audits to identify safety and health concerns and improve on deficiencies



PUBLIC CONFIDENCE, INFORMATION & ACCESS

Strategy Statement: Enhance public trust and confidence in West Virginia's courts through better public access to information, effective and transparent communications, and education.

Goal:

Improve internal communications through proactive measures including trainings, maximization of the use of technology, and information-gathering with the goal of increasing transparency both internally and externally.

Strategies:

- Enhance training and presentations as it relates to providing information and transparency
- Utilize technology and intranet to bolster internal communications
- Implement more opportunities for statewide information gathering

Goal:

Increase public confidence in the court system, and therefore public perception, by removing barriers for those interacting with the courts and creating more educational opportunities for the public to engage with the courts.

Strategies:

- Develop more opportunities for support and resources for self-represented litigants, as well as the public in general
- Establish systems that support equity and efficiency, therefore increasing the perception of the judiciary as an efficient entity

Goal:

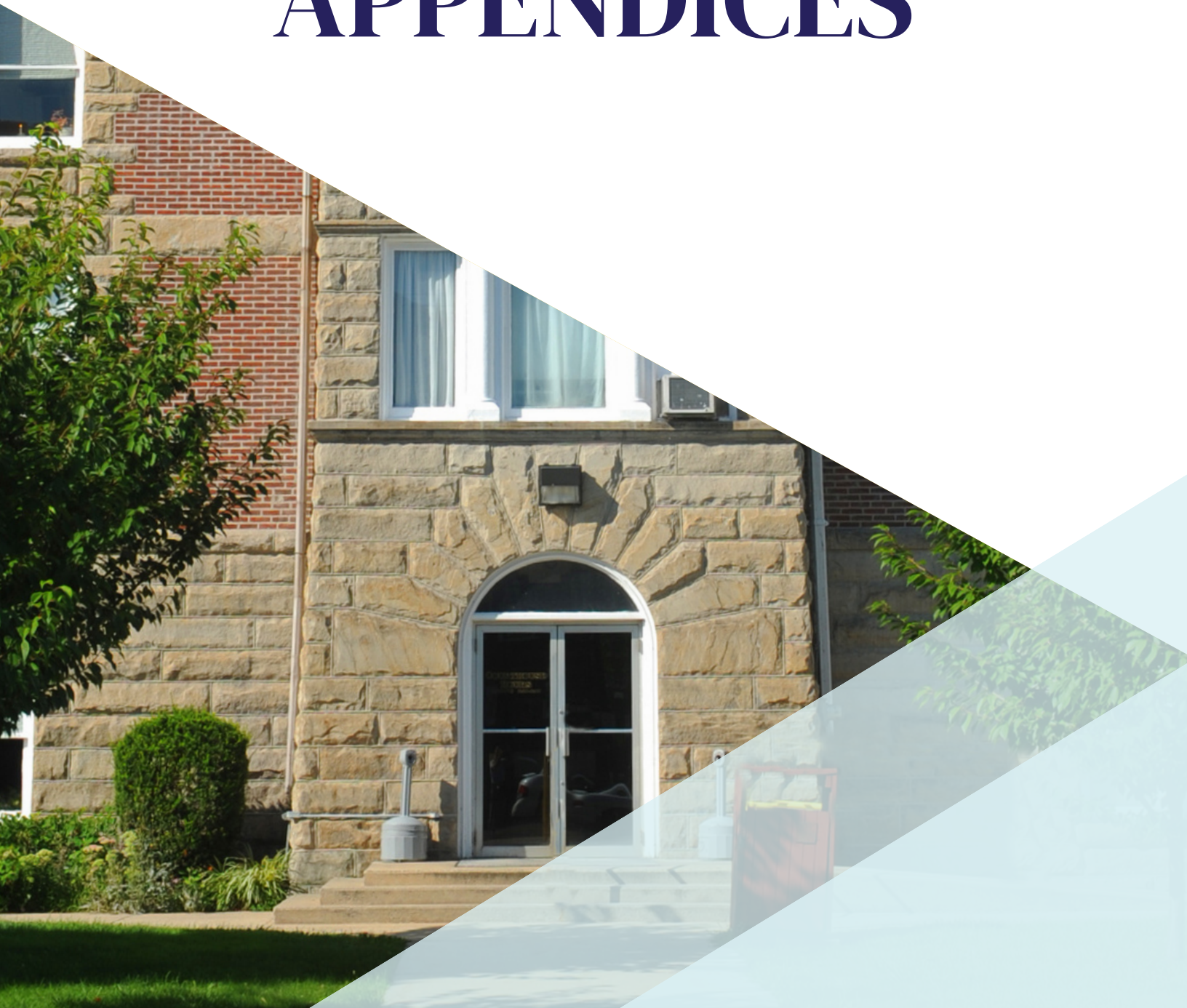
Develop stronger external communication strategies to enhance public access to information, create opportunities for public education, and maximize the use of social media.

Strategies:

- Enhance public access to information and transparency in order to increase the perception of a trustworthy judiciary
- Develop opportunities for community education, outreach, and engagement to better inform the public about the role of the judiciary
- Engage with media and utilize social media to share information, data, and develop trust
- Collaborate with West Virginia State Bar and other professional legal organizations on education and engagement opportunities



APPENDICES



Appendix A

Document Review

Financials

- FY22 Budget
- FY 23 Budget
- FY24 Budget
- WV-AB-AR-017_-_Appropriation_Request_By_Department
- WV-AB-AR-017_-_Appropriation_Request_By_Department-all funds-revised 01.13.2023
- Supreme Court budget presentation template
- Tab 4.1- Financial Statements
- Legislative auditor praises Supreme Court for changes made over last year_ West Virginia Record
- PA_2020_705
- PA_2021_727

Fund Development

- All Grants Summary
- Fy24 SCAWV Senate Presentation

Governance

- WV Constitution Article VIII
- Justices Bios and Picture
- 1-9-23 Minutes- FINAL
- 2-6-23 Minutes FINAL
- 11-16-22 Minutes- FINAL AMENDED
- Court Improvement Program- West Virginia Judiciary
- Court Improvement Program Projects- West Virginia Judiciary
- Board of Law Examiners- West Virginia Judiciary
- Final- WVJLAP-Brochure
- History_ Juvenile Justice Commission- West Virginia Judiciary
- Judicial Investigation Commission- West Virginia Judiciary
- Members_ Juvenile Justice Commission- West Virginia Judiciary

Management

- Administrative Office of the Courts- West Virginia Judiciary
- AAOOrgChart
- EmployeeHandbook
- 2020_EducationPolicy
- 2021_RemoteWorkPolicy

Appendix A cont.

Document Review

Management, cont.

- AOHiringProcessandProceduresPolicy
- AOPayPolicy
- Court Rules and Forms- West Virginia Judiciary
- Judiciary Policies _ West Virginia Judiciary
- RemoteWorkerEquipmentAccountabilityPolicy
- Agenda (1)
- Agenda (2)
- Agenda (3)
- Agenda (4)
- Agenda_FINAL
- Agenda
- Magistrate Conference Data
- Affirmative Action Plan 2020 SCAWV
- WV Code_51-1

Operations

- Final Report Future WV Judiciary-1998
- WV Independent Commission on Judicial Reform
- 2023 Spring Calendar
- 18 calendar_2023
- 2021AnnualReport6-24
- 2022CourtAnnualReportForWeb
- 2023Article1
- 2019FamilyDrugTreatmentCourtReport
- 2023FTCMap
- Access to Justice_Language Access- West Virginia Judiciary
- Access to Justice_Language Access- West Virginia Judiciary(1)
- Accessibility Information- West Virginia Judiciary
- ADCMap12-19-2022
- Circuit_Family Courts E-File_West Virginia Judiciary
- Copy of EE) report final
- CourtPLUS Initiative- Status_West Virginia Judiciary
- Employment Opportunities- West Virginia Judiciary
- JDCMap12-3-2022
- Juvenile Drug Court- West Virginia Judiciary
- Specialty Court Programs_ Adult Drug Courts-West Virginia Judiciary

Appendix A cont.

Document Review

Operations, cont.

- Specialty Court Programs_ Family Treatment Courts-West Virginia Judiciary
- Treatment Court Programs- West Virginia Judiciary
- West Virginia Circuit Court Judge Workload Study 2022 Final Report
- West Virginia Family Court Judge Workload Study 2022 Final Report
- West Virginia Magistrate Delphi Needs Assessment 2022 Final Report

Appendix B

Survey Summary Link:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1rXV79zzUpUGxVoVNBCYsjnTVyWdM3RsP/view?usp=sharing>

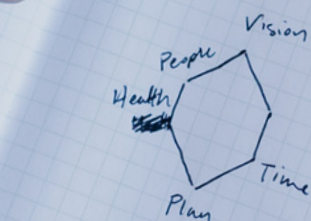
Appendix C

Focus group questions

Focus group questions

1. Describe your roles and responsibilities as it pertains to the WV judicial system.
2. What is your general experience interacting with the West Virginia Judiciary? What are some things that tend to go well, and what are some areas where there are consistent struggles?
3. What are your main struggles in your day to day interactions with the West Virginia Judiciary?
4. What systems or tools could be put in place to mitigate these struggles?
5. What does a “transparent” Judiciary mean to you?
6. What specific challenges or barriers do you perceive when it comes to achieving transparency in the West Virginia judiciary, and how do you think these obstacles can be addressed or overcome?
7. What are the key difficulties you have experienced in terms of collaboration and communication within the West Virginia judiciary?
8. What strategies or initiatives do you think could be implemented to promote better collaboration and communication within the West Virginia judiciary?
9. What makes your work easier and effective in terms of collaboration and communication within the West Virginia judiciary?
10. What strategies or initiatives do you think could be implemented to preserve these items or systems/tools/procedures that could be created?
11. How would you describe the perception of the West Virginia judiciary in regards to politics or partisanship, and what specific factors or instances contribute to this perception?
12. Can you describe the positive and negative effects of this?
13. What would you recommend in order to maintain or improve this perception?
14. What measures or changes do you believe could help address or mitigate the perception of political bias within the judicial system?
15. If you could change one thing about the court system in West Virginia, what would it be?
16. For those that work with individuals in the courts, what do your clients, or the people you work with, tell you about their experience/perception of the court system?
17. Is there anything else anyone would like to add? Anything we didn't ask that you wish we had?

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