

Nevada Judiciary Strategic Campaign 2022-2025

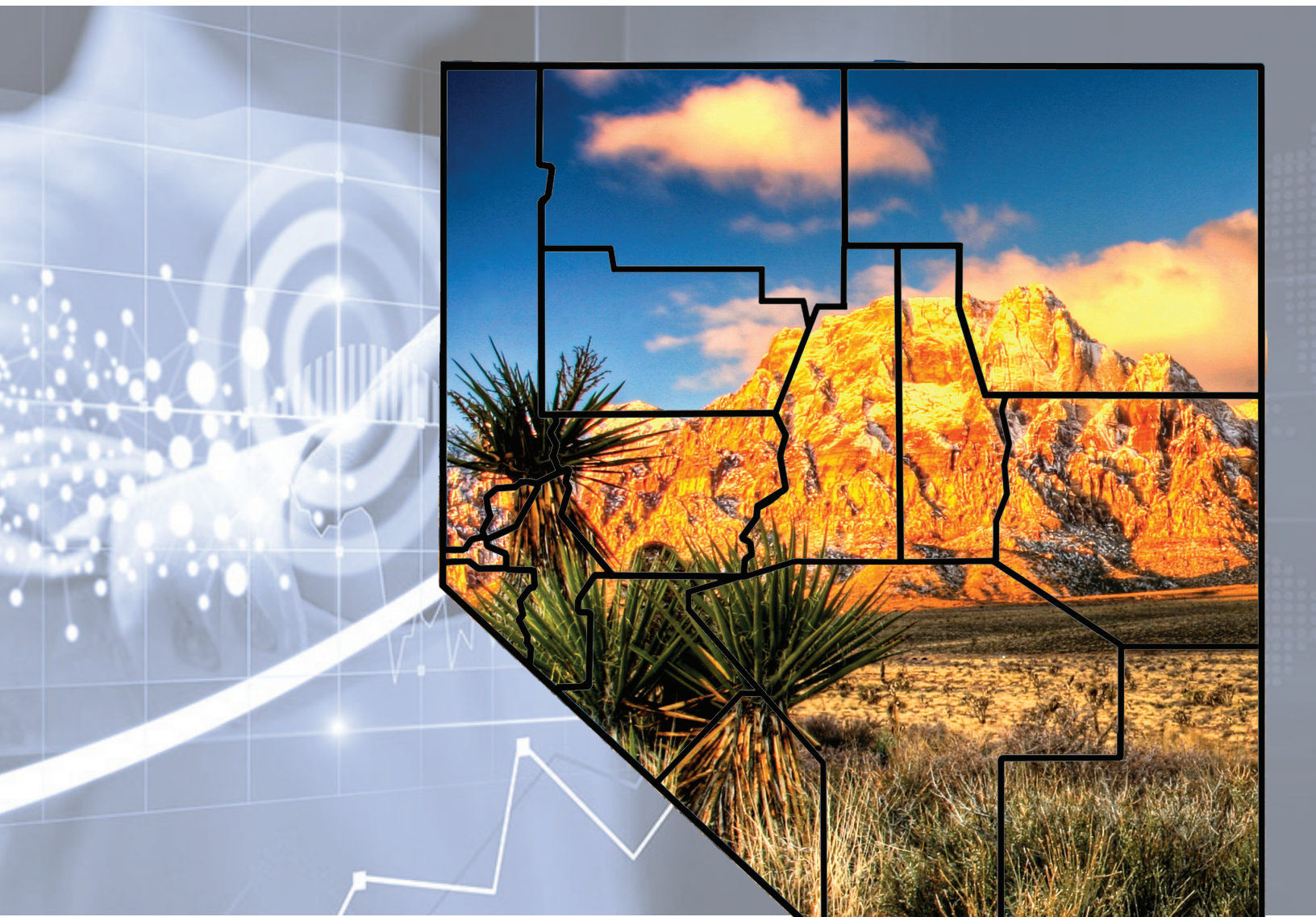


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Mission

The Nevada Judiciary, as an independent branch of government, provides fair, efficient, and timely justice for all. The Judiciary implements sustainable and innovative practices to improve public trust and confidence.

INTRODUCTION

The Strategic Campaign for the Nevada Judiciary is a three-year campaign (2022-2025) for long-term change. This campaign builds on existing achievements at both the state and local level and initiates additional strategic change. As the third branch of state government, the Nevada Judiciary is dedicated to a culture of constant improvement of the critical services it provides to those who depend on the courts. The key objectives in this campaign are guided by three primary strategies identified by Nevada's court leaders and are designed to improve the way that the Branch provides fair and timely access to justice. The three strategies are:

1. Simplify and improve public access to the courts while continuing to ensure that all parties are treated fairly.
2. Support sustainable and user-focused court innovations to improve the delivery of court services.
3. Develop methods for Nevada courts to be supported by both sustainable funding and appropriate judicial, personnel, and technological resources at all levels of the Branch.

These three strategies focus on achieving an overarching goal: the pursuit of a culture of constant improvement of the Nevada Judiciary through the adoption of user-focused practices. Within each strategy, several key objectives have been identified. The Nevada Judiciary is structured as a decentralized system, and hence, some courts have previously tackled some of these objectives and will focus their attention on others. This campaign is designed for courts to learn from each other and work to achieve individual and systemic successes.

National studies by the Pew Research Center reveal that the judiciary is the most trusted branch of government even as the research also shows that trust in governmental institutions is at historic lows. A poll conducted by the National Center for State Courts in the fall of 2021 reflects this trend, as results poll indicate that confidence in governmental institutions is the lowest it has been since NCSC began tracking it in 2012; but courts remain the most trusted institutions. However, public confidence in the courts fell from 78% in 2018 to 64% in 2021. Ultimately, the intended outcome of this strategic campaign is to improve public trust and confidence in the Nevada courts.

The Nevada Judiciary has incorporated many national innovations with respect to case management, performance measures¹, and court administration². The Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC)

1 See the National Center for State Court's *Courtools* at [Courttools.org](https://www.courttools.org)

2 See the National Center for State Courts Principles for Judicial Administration at [judicial-administration-report-9-20-12.pdf](https://www.ncsc.org/administration-report-9-20-12.pdf) ([ncsc.org](https://www.ncsc.org))

Vision

The pursuit of constant improvement within the Nevada Judiciary through the adoption of user-focused practices.

is in the process of selecting and implementing a statewide e-filing system and replacing the existing AOC-sponsored trial court case management system. The trial courts have also undertaken innovative practices for their own jurisdictions. For example, the Eighth Judicial District recently issued an order addressing pandemic related backlog and trial delays. Also, general and limited jurisdiction courts throughout the state made significant operational changes due to the pandemic, including the implementation of online hearings and public access to hearings³. These technological innovations that improve digital inclusion for all court users are long-term improvements in the daily operations of our courts.

Numerous courts throughout Nevada have developed mission statements to guide their work. Common themes include user focus; prompt, fair, accessible, and impartial justice; judicial independence and integrity; innovation; collaboration with court users; and preservation of public trust and confidence. The new mission statement for the Nevada Judiciary builds upon these local statements.

The Strategic Campaign identifies a few strategies that incorporate the common interests of judges and staff and provides a vehicle to implement the strategic direction for the Nevada Judiciary. The approach is a flexible, open-ended way to engage judges and staff around the issues faced by the Branch. It is less rigid and formal than traditional strategic planning and permits loosely coupled systems to focus on substantial and sustained planning, without limiting courts to the objectives listed.

APPROACH

In August 2021, the Nevada Judiciary initiated the Strategic Campaign. The process, assisted by NCSC, began with interviews of all Supreme Court Justices and Appellate Court Judges. Input from these Judges and Justices, combined with resources from the National Trial Court Performance Standards and the International Framework for Court Excellence, was used to create a survey that was administered to court staff and judges across the State. Three hundred and sixty-nine people responded to the survey, including 96 judges. In addition, over 70 people participated in twelve focus groups conducted in person and virtually. Results from the survey and the focus groups formed the basis of a work session conducted in January of 2022. The work session included members of the Judicial Council of the State of Nevada and the Strategic Campaign Steering Committee and was intended to create a common understanding of the Nevada Judiciary's highest priorities and values. By the end of the work session, the group agreed upon three strategies and 14 priority objectives.

3 See Second Judicial District Court at Online Hearings - Washoecourts

STRATEGIES AND KEY OBJECTIVES

1. Simplify and improve public access to the Nevada courts while continuing to ensure that all parties are treated fairly.

Nevada courts strive to maintain public trust and confidence. Integral to this goal is ensuring access and fairness in interactions with court users. The Nevada Judiciary will examine and work to remove unnecessary barriers to court access. This includes engaging with users who face special challenges in accessing the courts. Meeting the needs of self-represented court users, litigants with limited English proficiency, and those who face geographic barriers deserves and require special consideration and innovative approaches.

Key Objectives

- Develop and maintain guided interviews and common forms that are compatible with the statewide e-filing platform and are accepted by all trial courts in Nevada.
- Improve access to the courts for all users in the state by:
 1. Broadening and streamlining the availability of self-help resources through a single statewide portal.
 2. Improving accessibility to the courts for self-represented litigants.
 3. Creating educational content in electronic and hard copy for court users.
- Implement a sustainable outreach plan to engage and educate the public regarding the purposes and responsibilities of the courts.
- Increase uniformity in local court rules.

2. Support sustainable and user-focused innovations to improve the delivery of court services.

The Nevada Judiciary fosters sustainable innovation that improves service for all court users. Technological solutions and other approaches will continue to be examined and implemented to ensure the most efficient processes for judges, court employees and court users. Nevada courts will utilize technology that is designed to bridge the digital equity and inclusion divides by providing standard access to statewide information and user-friendly resources. As its case management and data management systems improve, so too will the Judiciary's ability to capture statewide case management data and develop consistent performance metrics.

Key Objectives

- Provide statewide availability of a modern and automated case management system. Implement a no-fee, publicly accessible, online tool to view statewide case information.
- Provide uniform access to information and consistency of data for statistical analysis through the creation of a data repository. Implement a statewide e-filing system.
- Move from performance measurement to performance management statewide where performance data becomes integrated with court management practices.
- Develop and produce informative and meaningful performance management reports for use by courts and the Branch as a whole.
- Conduct a feasibility study for the AOC to provide responsive and effective technical assistance to trial courts.

3. Develop methods for Nevada courts to be supported by both sustainable funding and appropriate judicial, personnel, and technological resources.

The Nevada Judiciary recognizes the importance of adequate, reliable, and sustainable funding for courts. Adequate court resources, including both financing and personnel, are fundamental to effective court operations. The Nevada judicial system includes 42 justice courts, 17 municipal courts, 11 district courts, and 2 appellate courts. Funding is not consolidated across the state and is appropriated by the incorporated municipalities, each of the counties, and the State of Nevada. The courts also rely heavily on fee revenue and administrative assessments for basic court operational needs, particularly at the limited jurisdiction and Supreme Court levels. This disparate funding model results in wide inequities between local courts. Thus, creating a negative perception of the Judiciary as a fair and independent entity, free of inappropriate pressures from funding sources.

The Nevada Judicial Branch is committed to examining options for reforming court funding structures to ensure funding is maintained at sustainable levels throughout the Branch. The complexity of this endeavor will require ongoing research and extensive collaboration with both the legislative and executive branches at both the state and local level. From 2022 – 2024, courts are encouraged to seek contract support to address case backlogs that were created as a result of, or exacerbated by, the COVID-19 pandemic. Those funds are to be used for one-time projects that will immediately improve the resolution of disputes.

In addition to addressing the current funding models, the Judiciary recognizes that we must continue to effectively manage our current resources both at the state and local levels. Existing human resource practices that vary between urban and rural districts or state and local entities create significant inequities in staff allocations, salaries, recruitment, and retainment practices. One promising approach is to enhance centralized support for trial courts in fundamental operational areas such as human resource assistance and assessment of staffing sufficiency in courts throughout the state. The proposed approach will require considerable investment of resources at the state level.

The Branch is committed to obtaining adequate funding for promising innovations. Therapeutic specialty court programs including drug courts, mental health courts and veterans courts are examples of highly effective courts in dealing with the root causes of criminal behavior. Despite their proven achievements, funding remains a barrier to maintain and expand these programs. As part of this three-year plan, the Nevada courts are committed to pursuing adequate funding for these innovative court approaches.

Key Objectives

- Consider and develop alternatives aimed at reducing or eliminating reliance on fees and administrative assessments. This would include studying possible paths to ensuring greater equity in court funding which may include increased or full funding by the State.
- Conduct a sustainability study and propose amendments to the current compensation and classification structure for the Appellate Courts.
- Conduct a feasibility study for the AOC to offer responsive and effective assistance to trial courts through:
 1. Centralized assistance in recruitment and staffing standards
 2. Staff Development/Leadership Training
 3. Training for new court administrators
- Obtain additional, sustainable funding for specialty courts.
- Assess the sufficiency of staffing of judicial officers and court employees

NEXT STEPS

This three-part strategy is directed at addressing major structural challenges that the Nevada Judiciary faces. The approaches are also aimed at making the best use of time and money, improving performance, embracing innovation, and challenging the status quo. The Judiciary implements sustainable and innovative practices to improve the public's trust and confidence in the Branch as a whole. The strength of the planning process is that it empowers judges and staff at all levels to identify objectives in their own courts that will contribute to furthering the key strategies identified in the campaign. In this way, the operation of the plan is integrated throughout the entire Branch.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

On the recommendation of its Steering Committee, the 2022-2025 Strategic Campaign for the Nevada Judiciary was approved by the Supreme Court of Nevada on April 21, 2022. This document was prepared following a series of surveys, interviews, focus groups, and a two-day summit. In collaboration with the AOC, NCSC prepared drafts of the campaign report for review and consideration by the Steering Committee. We thank all our participants for their ongoing commitment to continuous improvement of the Nevada Judiciary.

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