



January 2015

## CHARACTERISTICS OF AN EFFECTIVE COURT SYSTEM

Governance

Caseflow Management

Procedural Fairness

Technology Resources

Professional Development

Data-Driven Management

Strategic Thinking & Planning

Access to Justice

Financial Management

## TEAM SPOTLIGHT: TRAVIS COUNTY

With an estimated 2013 population of 1,120,954, Travis County is the fifth largest county by population in the state. Travis County has one probate court, eight statutory county courts and 17 district courts.

**Q: Is your team on target with the area of improvement identified at the Summit?**

**A:** We identified data-driven management as an area that may need improvement and initially wanted to improve the quality of the experience of our court customers and internal users using the CourTools Measure 1 – Access and Fairness. After further reflection, we chose to focus on the satisfaction of our court employees by assessing the quality of their work environment as well as relations between staff and management using CourTools Measure 9 – Court Employee Satisfaction.

Understanding how our employees perceive the workplace is essential to facilitate organization development and change as well as strengthen teamwork. Additionally, understanding management styles that best fit our increasingly younger work force will enhance job satisfaction and, ultimately, improve service to our customers. As we plan for our new Civil and Family Courthouse, a better understanding of our employees' needs will be invaluable, especially as our organization changes and grows.

**Q: What is the timeline for your project?**

**A:** We had hoped to conduct the CourTools survey in December/January. Due to several new judges in January 2015, a more realistic timeframe is February/March 2015.

**Q: What type of obstacles or resistance do you anticipate?**

**A:** Because the court employee satisfaction survey will be sanctioned by the Local Administrative Judge of the Civil Courts, we have not experienced any resistance. All judges, who work collaboratively on a daily basis as the result of our central dockets, will be advised at a future monthly Judges' Business Meeting of this project.



*The Honorable Paul J. De Muniz, Retired Chief Justice of the Oregon Supreme Court, speaking to Shared Solutions Summit attendees about effective courts.*

## Contact Us

Aurora Zamora, Court Consultant  
Office of Court Administration  
512-463-0976  
aurora.zamora@txcourts.gov

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*“The way your employees feel is the way your customers will feel. And if your employees don't feel valued, neither will your customers.”*

*Sybil F. Stershic, Taking Care of the People Who Matter Most: A Guide to Employee-Customer Care.*

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## RESOURCE SPOTLIGHT: MANAGING COURT STAFF

Courts will increasingly need to tackle the challenges of the multigenerational workforce. Insights about multigenerational differences in the court environment can be found in “[Recruitment & Retention of Multigenerational Court Staff](#)” by Faye Guertin. Another good resource is “[It Is All About the People Who Work in the Courthouse](#)” by Kevin Burke. This article discusses how tough budgetary times can mean lower morale at the courthouse and what judges can do to improve staff morale and, thus, the administration of justice.

## TEAM UPDATE: HARRIS COUNTY

The Harris County team continues to work on their centralized “start page” for all matters related to Harris County Justice.

### **Q. Were you on target when you defined your opportunity for improvement?**

**A.** Yes, the problem we identified is an achievable opportunity for improvement. The large decentralized nature of the Harris County justice community poses challenges to the distribution of information to persons who interact with the system on a daily basis. Individually, departments and agencies are efficient with business processes, including collaboration among departments. Many citizens who interact with the justice community – for marriage licenses, probate matters, small claims litigation, tow disputes, probationary matters, jury duty, and so on, are interacting with this environment for the first time and don’t know where to begin. Even public parties familiar with the system, attorneys for example, interact with a system that stands to improve access to the resources they seek.

### **Q. Has your team found any stumbling blocks?**

**A.** While enthusiasm and buy-in can be high, finding the time, staff, and funding to dedicate to new multi-department projects can be difficult. Independent Harris County departments are dedicated to addressing their specific missions and goals. Still, acknowledging the importance of our public presence is a starting point. From here, we can incorporate the topic into both existing and future projects.

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*Software innovation, like almost every other kind of innovation, requires the ability to collaborate and share ideas with other people, and to sit down and talk with customers and get their feedback and understand their needs.*

*Bill Gates*

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## RESOURCE SPOTLIGHT: STATE JUSTICE INSTITUTE

The [State Justice Institute](#) (SJI) was established by federal law in 1984 to improve the quality of justice in state courts and foster innovative, efficient solutions to common issues faced by all courts. To fulfill this mission, SJI awards grants that benefit the nation’s judicial system and the public it serves. The types of grants available are: project grants, technical assistance grants, curriculum adaptation & training grants, partner grants, strategic initiatives grants and education support grants. The remaining FY 2015 application deadlines are February 1, May 1, and August 1.

Each fiscal year, SJI allocates significant financial resources to support its Priority Investment Areas. For FY 2015, the Priority Investment Areas are: Limited English Proficiency (LEP); Self-Represented Litigation; Reengineering in Response to Budget Reductions; Remote Technology; Human Trafficking Issues in the State Courts; Immigration Issues in the State Courts; Guardianship, Conservatorship, and Elder Issues; and Juvenile Justice. The Priority Investment Areas are applicable to all grant types (with the exception of the Education Support Program). SJI strongly encourages potential grant applicants to consider projects addressing one or more of these Priority Investment Areas.