

ADVANCING JUDICIAL EXCELLENCE IN NEW MEXICO

At the request of Chief Justice Judy Nakamura, a special task force of New Mexico chief judges and court executive officers, working with the National Center for State Courts, developed a Leadership Summit to design a set of strategic directions for state's Judicial Branch. The planning team decided to try a novel, innovate process to do so by through the creation of a campaign approach to change.

This approach is an open-ended process to mobilized judges, staff and justice system partners around "vital improvement themes." It is a less ridged process than traditional strategic planning which often takes many months and cumbersome procedural steps to: identify mandates, analyze stakeholders, write mission and vision statements, determine trends, assess court system strengths/weaknesses, identify strategic issues, implement a plan, develop and assign action initiatives, and monitor, evaluate and correct overall directions.

This new planning process is particularly suited to loosely-coupled organizations and environments like courts and justice systems where the actions of independent work units in one part of the system can have little or no effect in another or may unpredictably trigger reactions out of proportion to the initial issues raised. A campaign approach also permits loosely-coupled systems to focus on substantial and sustained planning, not the plan as a document. As such, activities can move forward by consensus without the agreement of all.

The NCSC facilitated the Leadership Summit of chief judges, court executives, AOC leaders, and representatives of the state's judges' association in Taos in April 2018. Four strategic themes were identified including, (1) simplifying the court's organizational structure and streamlining case processing, (2) Expanding the use and deployment of technology (especially online services), (3) enhancing public access and awareness about court processes and programs, and (4) promoting safer, more user-friendly court facilities. The New Mexico Supreme Court has subsequently approved the campaign approach and strategies developed at the Summit.

These themes involve a number of objectives and initiatives that will be pursued over the next three years. The over-arching goal is to advance judicial excellence in court services and productivity through better use and smarter reallocation of existing resources for the citizens of the state. Many of the improvements are expected to be accomplished without significant infusions of new funding.