



Ontario Superior Court of Justice



LEADING THE JUSTICE SYSTEM INTO THE FUTURE

**Five Year Strategic Plan for the Ontario Superior Court of
Justice: 2025 to 2030**

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Table of contents

I.	Executive Summary	2
	Strategic Plan Objectives	2
	Major Themes of the Strategic Plan	3
II.	Objective 1.....	5
	CONTINUE MODERNIZATION	5
	Strategies	5
III.	Objective 2	9
	IMPROVE TIMELY JUSTICE	9
	Strategies	9
IV.	Objective 3.....	14
	ENHANCE ACCESS TO JUSTICE.....	14
	Strategies	14
V.	Objective 4.....	18
	ENHANCE & PRESERVE PUBLIC TRUST, CONFIDENCE, & UNDERSTANDING OF THE JUSTICE SYSTEM	18
	Strategies	18
VI.	Objective 5.....	22
	IMPROVE SAFETY AT COURTHOUSES.....	22
	Strategies	22
VII.	Resources & Endnotes	23

Executive Summary

On behalf of Regional Senior Justice Council, I am pleased to present the Ontario Superior Court of Justice's five-year strategic plan, "Leading the Justice System Into the Future".

As detailed in the Court's 2019 to 2023 Report, the Ontario Superior Court of Justice has recently navigated and led some of the most significant initiatives and reforms in its history. Among the most profound is the transition from paper to electronic and from primarily only in-person hearings to incorporating virtual and hybrid hearings. The Court is continuing this transformation with the implementation of an end-to-end digital solution and the reform of the *Rules of Civil Procedure*.

The Court's Regional Senior Judges Council sets the Court's direction and provides leadership for improving the Court and for advancing the consistent, independent, impartial, and accessible administration of justice. While the Ontario provincial government is responsible for the administration of justice in the province, the Court is committed to working collaboratively with the government and all justice stakeholders in making the justice system fair and accessible for all Ontarians.

This Strategic Plan will continue to guide us toward our goal of excellence in the administration of justice and in serving the people of Ontario.

This strategic plan has the following components:

- Regional Senior Judges Council's objectives for the Superior Court's administration of justice, and
- Strategies that will help manifest those objectives.

Strategic Plan Objectives

This Strategic Plan addresses the steps the Court intends to take in pursuing the following five principal objectives:

- (i) Continue modernization.
- (ii) Improve timely justice.
- (iii) Improve access to justice.

(iv) Enhance and preserve public trust and confidence in the judicial system through public and media outreach, education about the justice system, and greater transparency.

(v) Improve the security and safety of justice participants and the public at court facilities.

Major Themes of the Strategic Plan

- Fairness in all aspects of the administration of justice.
- Broad and timely access to the justice system.
- Public confidence in the administration of justice.
- Support for high ethical standards of judicial conduct including treating everyone with civility and respect.
- Respect for the Court and its justice participants.
- Improved transparency into the Court's work.
- Maintaining and supporting a highly competent and skilled judiciary.
- Adequate funding for the justice system.
- Improved security at courthouses.
- Effective relationship with the media and responsiveness to their role and needs.
- Effective public service and community outreach.
- Coordinated planning for the use of technology throughout the justice system.



Ontario Superior Court of Justice

Objective 1

Continue Modernization

Objective 1

CONTINUE MODERNIZATION

This objective requires a sustained commitment to advocating for the government's continued investment in technology.

Strategies

A. Technology in Courtrooms:

Ensure all courtrooms in the Ontario Superior Court of Justice ("SCJ") are equipped with up-to-date professional grade technology to seamlessly facilitate virtual, hybrid, and in-person hearings with digital evidence.

- **Strategy A1:** continue to advocate for the 'standard solution' to be installed in all Superior Court courtrooms. The 'standard solution' includes: a dedicated network connection; commercial-grade cameras; integrated commercial-grade audio, integrated monitors on judicial dais, witness stand, counsel tables and jury boxes.
- **Strategy A2:** continue to advocate that the government find and technologically equip office space for staff to conduct virtual hearings outside of physical courtrooms so that physical courtrooms can be efficiently and effectively used for hybrid and in-person hearings.
- **Strategy A3:** continue to advocate that the government upgrade Wi-Fi to ensure reliable bandwidth and connectivity for a justice system that is now digital: litigants, counsel, media, and the public must be able to reliably access the Superior Court's hearing management platform Case Center and the soon-to-be implemented end-to-end digital solution when attending a Court hearing.

B. Electronic Filing & Document Sharing Platform

Ensure mandatory electronic filing with limited exceptions, e.g., access to justice for self-represented litigants.

Work to develop processes to ensure a complete, accurate and reliable electronic court record.

Ensure all counsel, litigants, and judiciary use Case Center for all its hearings and events.

- **Strategy B1:** Continue to work with Court Services Division (CSD) to expand and continue improvement of electronic filing through Justice Services Online ("JSO").
- **Strategy B2:** Work with CSD on an interim storage file solution (interim until the Courts Digital Transformation's end-to-end digital solution is implemented). This involves ensuring all materials (filings and Court orders and endorsements) are stored in the Court's current case management system FRANK, while also ensuring judiciary can access all materials and prior orders and endorsements in Case Center. This must also include a strategy to ensure material filed by self-represented litigants is digitized and stored in FRANK and reliably accessed by judiciary in Case Center.
- **Strategy B3:** Ensure compliance with the Court's mandatory direction that all materials filed with the Court must be properly uploaded to Case Center.

C. Technology & Support

Continue to advocate for adequate on-site IT support at every SCJ courthouse.

Continue to require virtual IT support personnel that are responsive and competent in the technology and digital systems used by the courts and that they appreciate the critical need for timely solutions so that court time is not impacted.

- **Strategy C1:** Continue to advocate for sufficiently resourced onsite IT support. On-site support is critical to court operations and ensures that backlog and delay is not compounded by delay caused by technology failures.
- **Strategy C2:** Continue to require that agents, dedicated to virtual support for courtroom staff and the judiciary, appreciate the critical needs of the justice system and are competently trained on all technology and digital systems used by the court.

D. Court's Digital Transformation

The integrated project team (the Courts, the Ministry of the Attorney General, IT partners in the Ministries and Thomson Reuters) continue to work on building the digital end-to-end solution for Ontario courts that will provide a comprehensive and integrated filing, case management, and hearing management system. This digital system will replace current disconnected technology with one seamless system to support all areas of the Court's responsibility and the Court's main functions.

The solution will be implemented regionally across the province over the course of the next 6 years with the first roll out scheduled for the Toronto Region. The Toronto Region will have two phases: the first phase will roll out in relation to all SCJ Civil (including contested estates, bankruptcy, commercial, Divisional Court and Small Claims Court) and Family matters in 2025; the second phase will roll out in relation to Criminal in 2027. Thereafter each Region will roll out with the digital solution in all areas of the Court's responsibility – Civil, Family, Criminal, Divisional Court and Small Claims Court.



Ontario Superior Court of Justice

Objective 2

Improve Timely Justice

Objective 2

IMPROVE TIMELY JUSTICE

While this objective is necessarily dependent on a properly resourced justice system, it also requires a commitment to a renewed examination of existing processes and practices and a commitment to change or improve those existing processes and practices.

Strategies

A. Continue to advocate for sufficient judicial resources which are critical to delivering timely justice

While there are several factors contributing to delay in the justice system, critical to improving timely justice at the SCJ is ensuring that the SCJ has an adequate number of judges, associate judges and deputy judges to meet the ongoing demands of the justice system.

B. Continue to advocate for sufficient courthouse facilities, including courtrooms and chambers, which are critical to delivering timely justice

Again, while there are several factors contributing to delay in the justice system, critical to improving timely justice at the SCJ requires ensuring that our courthouse facilities expand at a rate commensurate with a growing population and the rising volume and complexity of litigation.

C. Examine existing Rules governing proceedings in Civil, Family, Criminal and Small Claims Court

- **Strategy C1:** Reform the *Rules of Civil Procedure*. The work of the Civil Rules Review ("CRR"), led by the Attorney General Doug Downey and Chief Justice Morawetz, was launched in early 2024, and is tasked with reforming the Rules to make civil proceedings more efficient, affordable, and accessible to all Ontarians. It should improve some of the major contributors to delay and provide litigants access to more timely justice in Civil matters. The CRR's policy proposals are due to

be submitted to the Attorney General and Chief Justice by September 2025 with a view to its implementation in January 2026.

- **Strategy C2:** Identify proposals for amendments to the *Family Law Rules* that would assist in ameliorating delay and contribute to more efficient, effective and accessible resolutions for all Ontario families.
- **Strategy C3:** Consider whether any further reform of the *Criminal Proceedings Rules* would contribute to more effective management of criminal matters at the SCJ. The *Criminal Proceedings Rules* were revised in May 2024. This revision included updating the Rules to simplify language and provide clear procedural directions and other modernization revisions.
- **Strategy C4:** Consider a reform of the *Rules of the Small Claims Court* and any related processes with a view to identifying changes that would assist in ameliorating delay and contribute to more efficient, effective, streamlined and accessible processes at the Small Claims Court.

D. Examine existing Case Management practices in Civil, Family, Criminal and Small Claims Court with a view to providing litigants more consistent and timely justice

Case management is a tool to assist the proper administration of justice including assisting in reducing court backlog and delays.

- **Strategy D1:** Examine and identify reforms in the *Rules of Civil Procedure* and related processes that could improve case management practices, thereby improving the timely resolution of civil disputes.
- **Strategy D2:** Consider strategies for an expansion of single judge case management in Family. Also study case management practices in Family Courts across jurisdictions to identify best practices and review SCJ's existing Family case management best practices (2019) and the Family Strategic Plan (2008) to determine whether to further incorporate any strategies for a more robust single judge case management model for Family.
- **Strategy D3:** Examine whether existing case management practices in Criminal proceedings could be improved to ensure cases are heard within *Jordan* timelines.

- **Strategy D4:** Examine where existing case management practices in Small Claims Court could be improved to provide for more timely resolution of Small Claims disputes.

E. Examine existing Scheduling Practices in Civil, Family, Criminal and Small Claims Court to determine whether there are strategies that could improve the timely resolution of cases in the justice system

Scheduling practices can contribute to better and more efficient use of court resources. It can also ensure that valuable court time is not wasted on meaningless appearances.

- **Strategy E1:** Examine and study 'best scheduling practices' for Civil proceedings across jurisdictions and consider developing and implementing scheduling practices to improve the timely resolution of disputes in the Civil justice system and ensure each appearance is meaningful.
- **Strategy E2:** Examine 'best scheduling practices' for Family proceedings across jurisdictions and consider developing scheduling practices to improve the timely resolution of disputes in the Family justice system and ensure each appearance is meaningful.
- **Strategy E3:** Examine 'best scheduling practices' for Criminal proceedings across jurisdictions and consider developing scheduling practices to improve the timely resolution of disputes in the Criminal justice system and ensure each appearance is meaningful.
- **Strategy E4:** Examine 'best scheduling practices' for Small Claims Court proceedings across jurisdictions and consider developing scheduling practices to improve the timely resolution of disputes in the Small Claims Court justice system and ensure each appearance is meaningful.

F. Promote Accountability & Compliance by Litigants and Counsel

Leadership on combatting a 'culture of complacency' with an objective of achieving timely justice starts with the judiciary. The SCJ must lead this cultural change and ensure that the government, litigants, and counsel understand that complacency is not acceptable.

The judiciary has a responsibility to set the pace of litigation and enforce any applicable rules and practice directions of the Court.

Each court appearance must be meaningful. Litigants and counsel who do not comply with the rules of court and practice directions or who exploit them, must be held accountable for the resulting delay and backlog in the justice system.

- **Strategy F1:** Ensure that counsel comply with the Court's mandatory filing directions and the mandatory uploading directions to Case Center.
- **Strategy F2:** Require counsel to abide by court timelines and consider consequences for any breaches.
- **Strategy F3:** Subject to procedural fairness, consider imposing a higher threshold for granting adjournments.



Ontario Superior Court of Justice

Objective 3

Enhance Access to Justice

Objective 3

ENHANCE ACCESS TO JUSTICE

While this objective relies on the government's commitment to resourcing and support for litigants navigating the justice system, it also requires a commitment from our Court to provide consistent and accessible information about its processes.

Strategies

Access to justice requires that the public is provided consistent, clear, and efficient processes for the resolution of their legal disputes. The Court must strive to ensure that it remains comprehensible, consistent, and efficient for those who access the justice system.

A. Examine the Court's existing processes to determine where improvements for enhancing access to justice can be made

- **Strategy A1:** Review the Court's practice directions, and related processes for simplicity, efficiency, and consistency.
- **Strategy A2:** Ensure that Court rules, practice directions, and related processes are published or posted in an accessible manner.
- **Strategy A3:** Re-design the SCJ website to ensure:
 - litigants, counsel, media and the general public have comprehensive, readily accessible information about how to access the Court.
 - that the Court's website is user-friendly and navigable especially for self-represented litigants.

B. Support for self-represented litigants

To ensure the effective operation of the adversarial system and access to legal representation when needed, the Court must advocate that the

government provide both legal and non-legal supports for litigants representing themselves.

Expanding access to legal aid including the availability of duty counsel at Court is essential to fair and accessible justice, and so too are accessible tools and proactive processes to inform and assist self-represented litigants procedurally at crucial stages of their case. "Accessible tools and proactive processes may significantly reduce the strain on court staff and minimize wasted court time. Conversely, the absence of such tools and processes may place a significant strain on court staff required to repeatedly assist individual litigants on the same issues and may result in repeated adjournments to enable litigants to take the steps required to move their case forward."ⁱ

- **Strategy B1:** Continue to advocate for expanded Legal Aid assistance.
- **Strategy B2:** Continue to advocate for the availability of duty counsel at the SCJ for its family and criminal matters.
- **Strategy B3:** Work with the National Self-Represented Litigant Project on further strategies that could support self-represented litigants.
- **Strategy B4:** Continue to advocate for other supports for self-represented litigants such as computer kiosks at each courthouse and a 'help' desk with on-site 'self-rep navigators.'
- **Strategy B5:** Develop user-friendly guides for self-represented litigants for processes in all areas of the Court's responsibility – Civil, Family, Criminal and Small Claims Court. Continue to develop user-friendly online training materials, guides and instructional videos, posted on our Court's website, on filing and the use of technology, including the Court's hearing management platform (Case Center).

C. Expand Unified Family Court

An expansion of the Unified Family Courts will enhance access to justice for families in Ontario because the justice system serves the public best when Ontario families can resolve all their legal issues in one place.

The Court will continue to advocate for the province-wide expansion of Unified Family Courts at the SCJ.

D. Consider enhancing access to Justice for Indigenous People at the SCJ

- **Strategy D1:** Examine the feasibility of creating space at the SCJ for the use of Indigenous ceremonies and practices including sacred objects and other meaningful symbols in the courtroom.
- **Strategy D2:** Examine the feasibility of integrating Indigenous Justice and Healing Programs and any other recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action as applied to the Courts.



Ontario Superior Court of Justice

Objective 4

**Enhance & Preserve Public Trust,
Confidence, & Understanding of
the Justice System**

Objective 4

ENHANCE & PRESERVE PUBLIC TRUST, CONFIDENCE, & UNDERSTANDING OF THE JUSTICE SYSTEM

This objective requires a sustained commitment to education about the justice system and outreach to the communities the Court serves. It also requires providing reliable and accurate insight into the Court's work.

Strategies

A. Media Relations & Access

While judicial independence necessarily constrains the judiciary's ability to participate in public discourse, the Court must nevertheless strive to contribute to an accurate understanding and portrayal of the justice system. "Justice must not just be done; it must be *seen* to be done." Therefore, it is essential to interact with the media to provide insight into, and understanding of, the justice system.

- **Strategy A1:** Create a Chief Communications Officer position in the Office of the Chief Justice so that media have a person to direct their inquiries.
- **Strategy A2:** Organize an annual media conference with the Chief Justice and media representatives.
- **Strategy A3:** Create a Media Relations Committee with representation from media outlets across the province and representation from the Ministry of Attorney General and judiciary. It will provide a forum for journalists and the Court to discuss issues of mutual concern including:
 - Creating regular, open, and clear channels of communication between the Court and members of the news media;
 - Providing members of the news media with the information, access, and resources necessary to accurately report on court proceedings;

- Discussing methods to improve media's access to the Court and its processes; and
 - Helping members of the news media and public improve their understanding of the administration of justice in Ontario.
- **Strategy A4:** Outreach to College and University journalism programs with a view to creating opportunities for the Court to speak to journalism students about the justice system.

B. Community Outreach & Engagement

Our Court has an important role to play in civic education and ensuring broad understanding of our Court and the justice system. Educating the public about our constitutional democracy and why core principles such as the 'Rule of Law' and judicial independence are critically important is essential to building and maintaining the public's confidence in the justice system.

- **Strategy B1:** Create a Community Engagement Advisory Group responsible for considering and developing educational and other engagement opportunities with the public including:
 - Proposing educational events and initiatives for the community.
 - Identifying stakeholders and community groups to create a forum for community engagement and listening.
 - Reviewing community engagement activities in other jurisdictions, with a view to adapting some of them for our Court.

C. Improve insight into the Court's work

- **Strategy C1:** Work with the Ministry of the Attorney General to build processes that more reliably and accurately capture data so that the Court can reliably and accurately report on its work with particular focus on building this infrastructure in the Court's Digital Transformation solution.
- **Strategy C2:** Develop regular data reporting on the new SCJ website.

D. Use of AI

To ensure public confidence in a fair, impartial, and independent justice system, the Court must consider developing guidelines on this evolving technology.

- **Strategy D1:** Continue to work with the Court of Appeal for Ontario and the Ontario Court of Justice in examining and studying the use of AI.
- **Strategy D2:** Create an SCJ AI Committee with particular focus on studying and developing guidance for the use of AI by litigants and any potential use by judiciary.

E. Supporting judicial education & promoting the highest ethical standards

Public confidence in the justice system requires impartial, competent, and respectful judges. It is imperative that judges remain current in the development of the law. This includes staying on top of current developments in substantive and procedural law and education on social context issues affecting the administration of justice.

The SCJ's judiciary must also reflect and promote the highest standards of judicial conduct including treating everyone with respect and civility.

- **Strategy E1:** Expand and continue to develop robust support for judiciary's continuing education.
- **Strategy E2:** Support continued guidance on ethical principles particularly for new judges.

F. Promote respect and decorum

Ensuring respect and decorum for all proceedings at the SCJ, whether in person or virtual, improves the experience for all justice participants and contributes to building confidence in the justice system. The SCJ judiciary must lead and enforce civility, respect and decorum.



Ontario Superior Court of Justice

Objective 5

Improve Safety at Courthouses

Objective 5

IMPROVE SAFETY AT COURTHOUSES

This objective includes ensuring that all courthouses are safe to attend.

Strategies

A. Security at Courthouses

A courthouse must be a safe and secure place. Anyone who attends a courthouse, whether it be the judiciary, staff, litigants, counsel, or the public, *must be* safe and *must feel* safe. No one should ever feel that attending a courthouse might result in them being threatened, intimidated, or harmed.

- **Strategy A1:** Work with the government to identify key minimum security standards for any courthouse, and continue to advocate that the government implement these essential security measures consistently at every courthouse across the province in the immediate future.
- **Strategy A2:** Advocate for police compliance with their legislative responsibility for safety at courthouses. This should include resources to screen entry into courthouses and to ensure safety within courtrooms.
- **Strategy A3:** Consider and study whether new technology and societal changes requires new safety and security features at courthouses into the future.

Resources & Endnotes

Action Committee on Modernizing Court Operations ("Action Committee") (a national leadership body co-chaired by the Chief Justice of Canada and the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada) suggestions for [Implementing Early and Ongoing, Robust and Consistent Case Management Practices](#).

See the Action Committee's suggestions [for Optimizing Scheduling Practices](#).

See the Action Committee's suggestions for [Promoting the Accountability of Parties and their Counsel](#)

ⁱ Action Committee's Roadmap to recovery: Orienting principles for reducing court backlog and delay, Addressing the Diverse Needs of Justice System Participants, Self-Represented Litigants, page 4