



Judicial Branch of Georgia

Georgia Courts Automation Commission



Strategic Plan

June 2004

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Planning Background

The Georgia Courts Automation Council (GCAC) was enacted through legislation passed in 1990. The enacting legislation authorizes the Commission to:

- Define, implement, and administer a state-wide courts automation system;
- Coordinate and cooperate with the state's chief information officer with regard to planning, implementation, and administration of a state-wide courts automation system to take advantage of existing state resources where possible;
- Receive electronic data from the civil case filing and disposition forms that are required to be filed in civil cases and that are transmitted to the commission by the Georgia Superior Court Clerks' Cooperative Authority in a format and media agreed to by the commission and the authority;
- Compile the civil filings and dispositions data, and provide such data to the Administrative Office of the Courts;
- Participate in agreements, contracts, and networks necessary or convenient for the performance of these duties and for the release of the information from civil case filing and disposition forms;
- Administer federal, state, local, and other public or private funds made available to it for implementation of the courts automation system;
- Coordinate state-wide strategies and plans for incorporating county and local governments into the courts automation system, including review of requirements of the several state agencies for documents, reports, and forms and the consolidation, elimination, or conversion of such documents, reports, and forms to formats compatible with electronic transmittal media;
- Establish policies and procedures, rules and regulations, and technical and performance standards for county and local government access to the courts automation system network; and
- Offer advisory services to county and local governments to assist in guiding their efforts toward automating their court procedures and operations.

With such a broad mandate and limited resources GCAC focused their efforts in providing a state-wide case management system to all trial courts. This system has been rolled out to approximately 105 courts across 40 counties in the state. Recently GCAC resources responsible for the case management system have been transferred to the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC). In addition, Judge Timothy Pape has been named the new chairman of the GCAC and is focused on redefining the GCAC to be more of a standards and policy setting commission related to court automation. Judge Pape saw as the first step in redefining the GCAC the need to develop a 3-4 year strategic plan which would provide the overall direction of GCAC and could be used to foster improved communication and collaboration from various court entities involved with automation. The following presents the results of the GCAC strategic planning activity.

Current Situation Analysis

The GCAC interacts with many stakeholders involved with court automation. By understanding the nature of each relationship provides valuable input into the strategic planning process. The planning participants assessed the relationship with each stakeholder group by answering the following questions:

- What works well?
- What does not work well?
- What are the greatest areas for improvement?

Organization	What Works Well?	What Does Not Work Well?	Greatest Areas for Improvement?
AOC	Good communication, Together provide good technical support	Respective roles are unclear, While we communicate there are still many misunderstandings	Clarify relationship, Specify respective roles and responsibilities
Local Courts	Supporting a lot of the courts with the greatest need, Providing good technical support	Expectations exceed staffing and capability, Viewed as competitor to private software vendors	Establishment and acceptance of state-wide automation standards, Service Level Agreement with each class of court
Appellate Courts	Participate on GCAC, Generally satisfied with current system	Reluctant to change	Establishment and acceptance of state-wide automation standards (smallest group in Judiciary)
Clerks Cooperative Authority	Active with court automation initiatives	Perceived overlapping roles, Not meeting statutory reporting requirements	Clarify roles, Establish relationship with key members
Clerks of Court	Gaining access to free case management software, High satisfaction level with technical support	Expectations exceed staffing and capability	Support alternatives, Service Level Agreements with each class of court
Various Councils	Day to day interaction	Overlapping roles on automation issues	GCAC Mission that is clear and complimentary, Provide services to accomplish standardization, Provide automation policy direction
General Assembly	Supported funding requests	With turnover understanding of Judicial branch eroding, Legislation is passed with unintended consequences	Be proactive in explaining charter and benefits
Criminal Justice Agencies	Anxious to establish information exchanges,	No organizational structure to do business	Establishment and acceptance of state-wide automation standards, Be more proactive in developing information exchanges
Other State Agencies	Anxious to establish information exchanges, Good relationship with GTA	Limited standards, Do not have a single point of contact	Establishment and acceptance of state-wide automation standards, Be more proactive in developing information exchanges

Several key themes surfaced through this analysis:

- The need for a clearer GCAC mission.
- The need to clarify and/or redevelop key relationships with the various stakeholder groups.
- The need for common state-wide standards and policies related to automation.
- The need to further educate the various stakeholder groups related to the benefits and potential for further automation.
- The need to develop alternative funding sources for automation.
- The need for new approaches for support and to manage expectations.

This information provided key input into the strategic planning activity.

Strategic Direction

The strategic direction consists of GCAC’s Mission, Vision, Goals and Objectives as follows.

Mission

The Mission Statement defines the overall purpose of the Commission and answers the following questions:

- Why do we exist?
- Who do we serve?
- What need are we attempting to fill?

The Mission of the Commission follows:

Mission

To facilitate the automation and sharing of information through the establishment of standards and information exchange processes for the benefit of the Courts and citizens of Georgia.

Vision

The Vision Statement is a concise declaration of the direction that the Commission is planning over the next 3-4 years. The vision of the Commission follows:

Vision

**Better Information
Better Decisions
Truer Justice**

Goals

A Goal is a broad area of endeavor that must be addressed if the Commission is to make progress towards its vision. The Commission identified the following four goals:

1. To facilitate the establishment of common statewide data standards for all class of courts. The benefits of court automation have been well established including productivity and efficiency improvements, the ability to meet legislated requirements for centralized court data and the ability to meet federal requirements to report criminal data. The foundation of an effective court automation strategy is a set of standards to support data exchange between judicial data stakeholders. The GCAC will take an active role in facilitating the development of standards between stakeholders. Each stakeholder group will be involved in a collaborative basis to develop and then deploy the standards.
2. To convey the need for and benefits of the exchange of information among the courts, agencies and legislature. The GCAC will provide leadership in gathering benefits and best practices to further justify expansion of Georgia's court automation. Alternative funding approaches will be identified to ensure all levels of local courts have access to court automation. Local court decision making will be preserved related to automation decisions.
3. To ensure the quality and integrity of our outcomes through collaboration. Collaboration and facilitation are foundational operating principals of the GCAC. Each stakeholder group has unique requirements. Only through collaboration and effective facilitation will common standards be developed and court automation expanded within the State.
4. To facilitate the sharing of data among local, state and federal agencies. GCAC will act as the advocate and facilitator among local, state and federal agencies in developing information exchanges. It is expected that many exchanges will develop without the need for GCAC involvement except for the establishment of common state-wide standards.

Objectives

Objectives are specific, quantifiable, realistic targets that measure the accomplishment of a goal over a specified period. Objectives define how success will be measured in accomplishing a goal. Objectives were developed for each business goal, which follows:

Goal #1 - To facilitate the establishment of statewide data standards for each class of courts.

- Establish common state-wide data standards within 1 year.
- Standards are adopted by each class of court (councils) within 3 years. (100% adoption)

Goal #2 - To convey the need for and benefits of the exchange of information among the courts, agencies and legislature.

- Achieve three successful information exchanges between a class of court and state agencies.
- Standards are adopted by each class of court within 3 years. (100% adoption)

Goal #3 - To ensure the quality and integrity of our outcomes through collaboration.

- All new projects are structured to encourage collaboration of all key stakeholders starting immediately.
- Standards are adopted by each class of court and agencies within 3 years. (100% adoption)

Goal #4 - To facilitate the sharing of data among local, state and federal agencies.

- Complete six data exchanges between a court and a federal/state agency within three years.
- 80% of traffic dispositions are filed electronically by 2007

Strategy Definition

In considering the strategies to achieve the strategic goals, the Commission also considered those factors that were deemed as critical in the attainment of the goals. In addition, the Commission identified various barriers that may impede the achievement of their goals.

Critical Success Factors

Factors that were deemed critical in the attainment of the Commission’s goals are:

- Each class of court must buy into the GCAC role of facilitation
- Each class of court will need access to staff
- Well articulated benefits of information exchanges
- Be proactive to sell message – especially to legislature
- Communicating the win/win
- Willingness of stakeholders to collaborate
- Must of standardized data to share
- Must have qualified staff
- Expectations must be managed

Inhibitors

Those factors that may impede the GCAC in achieving their goals are:

- GCAC credibility – legitimacy of the Commission
- Access to right judicial staff
- Turf battles
- Lack of GCAC membership time to allocate
- Message may not be compelling
- Disparate level of commitment
- No monetary enticement
- Lack of funding

Strategies

Considering both the crucial success factors and the barriers, the strategies for the GCAC over the next 3-4 years are:

Goal #1 : To facilitate the establishment of statewide data standards for each class of courts.

Strategies:

- Define a framework for standards development (determine what & how)
- Acquire resources to develop and communicate common state-wide standards
- Develop certification process based on the state-wide common standards

Goal #2: To convey the need for and benefits of the exchange of information among the courts, agencies and legislature.

Strategies:

- Collect benefits on information exchange for each stakeholder
- Develop and execute comprehensive communication plan related to benefits

Goal #3: To ensure the quality and integrity of our outcomes through collaboration and facilitation.

Strategies:

- Revise protocol for approval of GCAC projects.
- Educate/inform classes of courts in development of evaluation criteria for standards and programs.

Goal #4: To facilitate the sharing of data among local, state and federal agencies.

Strategies:

- Target key stakeholders to obtain commitment in development/ participation in an information exchange
- Continue education process of GCAC members on issues of technology and federal mandates.
- Engage contract manager to accomplish establishment of and to publish relevant standards

In addition to these strategies the Commission also developed several positions on key issues including:

- Long term, the Commission needs to remove itself from the responsibility for any software products. The Commission needs to be viewed as the automation policy and standards body for the Georgia Judicial Branch.
- The Commission will provide leadership through facilitation and collaboration as opposed to dictating direction.
- The Commission will develop resourcing strategies to accomplish the day to day responsibilities of the Commission.

Priorities

The strategies were prioritized considering overall stakeholder value, stakeholder impact, and time and complexity to implement. The strategies were then stratified into three tiers.

Tier 1 (Highest Priority)

1. Define a framework for standards development (determine what & how)
2. Collect benefits on information exchange for each stakeholder
3. Develop and execute comprehensive communication plan related to benefits

Tier 2 (Medium Priority)

1. Acquire resources to develop and communicate common state-wide standards
2. Educate/inform classes of courts in development of evaluation criteria for standards and programs.
3. Target key stakeholders to obtain commitment in development/participation in an information exchange
4. Engage contract manager to accomplish establishment of and to publish relevant standards

Tier 3 (Lower Priority)

1. Develop certification process based on the state-wide common standards
2. Revise protocol for approval of GCAC projects.
3. Continue education process of GCAC members on issues of technology and federal mandates.

Immediate Actions

A 30-60 day plan was developed which includes the following actions:

- Formalize arrangement / agreement with ACO regarding SUSTAIN. Transfer “practical” ownership of SUSTAIN to AOC – whatever can be done legally.
- Discussions with key stakeholder contacts:
 - Supreme court committee
 - Judicial counsel
- Develop resourcing plan with assistance from AOC
 - Build presentations
 - Gather data
 - Manage our projects
 - Develop standards
 - Facilitate sessions
- Prepare and agree to a Memo of Understanding regarding SUSTAIN that clearly defines responsibilities between AOC and GCAC (i.e., development, support, enhancements, reporting, etc.)

Responsibilities in preparation for next GCAC meeting June 17th follows:

- Judge Pape – Contact State of Ohio to gather best practices regarding standards framework.
- Judge Van Horn – Approach for documenting benefits
- Judge Harris – Draft high-level communications plan

A key topic for the June 17th meeting will be resource skill requirements.

Appendix

A. Planning Participants

Judge Timothy Pape, GCAC Chairman – Juvenile Court of Floyd County

Judge Samuel D. Ozburn – Superior Court, Alcovy Judicial Circuit

Judge Jackson Harris – Superior Court, Blue Ridge Judicial Circuit

Judge Kenneth Van Horn – Probate Court of Chattahoochee County

Judge William Coolidge – Municipal Judge

Mr. George Nolan – GCAC Executive Director, Administrative Office of the Courts

Mr. David Ratley – Director, Administrative Office of the Courts

Mr. Vince Harris – Associate Director, Administration, Administrative Office of the Courts

Facilitation resources:

Dave Farrington, The North Highland Company

Drew Schrader, The North Highland Company

B. Responsibility Matrix (GCAC vs. AOC)

AOC/GCAC Responsibility Matrix (Draft)

AOC Responsibility	Products/Services	GCAC Responsibility
Implementation Support Technical Support Develop & Issue Service Level Agreements Vendor relations Pay annual fee Help Desk	SUSTAIN	Make available to AOC via MOU Policy Approve Service Level Agreements Develop 'exit' strategy (all software)
Implementation Support Technical Support Develop & Issue Service Level Agreements Help Desk	Other Internally Developed Courts Automation Software	Policy Approve Service Level Agreements
	Certification	Legal standards / opinions Survey of classes of courts (Contract Mgr.) Survey vendors (Contract Mgr.) Set Standards Certification
Assist in the creation of the RFP Identification of best practices	Standards	Responsible for hiring contract staff Develop standards
Generate and receive information Assist in the creation of the RFP Identification of best practices	Information Exchange	Setting standards Facilitate the process Contract out actual development
Liaison with Council technology representatives and automation committees Facilitate contacts with state agencies Provide some staff	Collaboration	Identify Council members who will assist
Provide marketing resources as support Gather information sharing benefits	Selling the Benefits	GCAC members will deliver the message