

LONG RANGE PLAN ACCOMPLISHMENTS



LONG RANGE PLAN

The United States Bankruptcy Court for the Central District of California implemented its second Long Range Plan in September 2006. Responding to the challenges the Court faced in the middle of the last decade, this Long Range Plan identified and addressed strategic needs in five areas—Case Management, Community Outreach, Facilities and Security, Human Resources and Information Management—with “an emphasis on streamlining the planning process in accord with the streamlining of operations of the Court.”

The second Long Range Plan has been substantially consummated, and a new Long Range Plan will be drafted in 2011 and implemented under the leadership of Chief Judge Peter Carroll. The new plan will respond to present challenges with a new set of objectives, such as adjusting to the budget pressures the Court is likely to face in the coming years and developing creative ways of using new technology to fulfill the Court’s mission.

The following pages list the second Long Range Plan’s objectives and provide a brief report on the status of each objective.

Case Management

Obj.#	Objective	Accomplishments/Status
1	Expand site-based <i>pro bono</i> assistance program.	<p>In May 2010, the Northern Division Consumer Debt Clinic relocated from the Lompoc Courthouse to the Northern Division Courthouse.</p> <p>The Los Angeles, Northern, San Fernando Valley, and Santa Ana Divisions now have onsite Self-Help Desks that provide free legal information and reference materials. Although Riverside Division does not yet offer an onsite Self-Help Desk, in 2010, the Public Service Law Corporation hosted four free bankruptcy seminars for <i>pro se</i> debtors in Riverside. Beginning in 2011, the seminars will be held on a bi-monthly basis.</p> <p>In August, the Judicial Conference’s Committee on Court Administration and Case Management approved a proposal by the Bankruptcy Court Administration Division for a pilot program allowing self-represented parties to file their cases electronically. The national group developing this e-file program is called the <i>Pro Se</i> Pathfinder.</p>
2	Encourage increased use of telephonic and video appearances where appropriate.	In 2010, two hearing rooms were constructed in the Riverside Division to allow judges from other divisions to hold hearings via videoconference. Beginning in 2011, judge-appointees Clarkson and Wallace will use these rooms to hear their Riverside cases from the Santa Ana Division.
3	Encourage judges to serve in a different division at least once a year.	Judges Bluebond, Bufford, E. Carroll, Donovan, and Neiter were assigned a portion of the Riverside Division case filings that they heard by videoconference from their Los Angeles Division courtrooms.
4	Facilitate the judges’ ability to prepare more orders.	<p>Objective completed.</p> <p>Lodged Order Upload (LOU) program launched in September 2007. Multiple enhancements implemented in CIAO!</p>

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5	Reduce Clerk's Office labor component for all case processing and case management functions.	<p>Lodged Order Upload program launched in September 2007. Usage has increased steadily since then and is now about 75 percent. ECF usage became mandatory on April 1, 2007. High-volume claim filers registered to use ECF. Quality control tracking program developed to identify common errors and users with high error rates to target training/remedial action. Online training modules developed to replace CM/ECF classroom training. Reinstated automatic dismissal of deficient cases to reduce referrals to the judges. Adopted district-wide procedures for the electronic service of adequate protection orders and relief from stay orders.</p> <p>Headers no longer needed to be inserted for the Proof of Service (POS) and Notice of Entry (NOE), greatly reducing staff labor. Orders are now much easier for attorneys to prepare, reducing time spent by Court staff answering questions, such as how to add POS and NOE pages, and also time spent by staff fixing orders where the formatting was unacceptable due to the way in which the POS and NOE were imported into the order.</p> <p>In 2010, commenced program to acknowledge staff who propose ideas for improving the Court's efficiency.</p>
6	Standardize docket entries.	<p>Trained registered ECF attorneys to use correct docket codes. Discontinued routine docketing of unused orders. Quality control tracking program developed to identify common errors and users with high error rates to target training/remedial action. Online training modules developed to target common errors/inconsistencies.</p>
7	Explore the ability to process documents while working at an alternative location. (<i>See also</i> Human Resources Objective #1)	<p>Telework program in place. Clerk's Office staff at divisions use electronic systems to assist each other as needed. The new Operations Support Team supports the continuity of operations planning efforts by allowing team members to telework up to three days a week. Operations Support also performs quality control and other functions for the District's divisions.</p>
8	Facilitate, as appropriate, the administration of small cases.	<p>Proposals from trustee working committee forwarded to Rules Committee for consideration. Made new national forms available on the Court's website for small business cases. Individual Chapter 11 Task Force formed and developed forms and procedures for individual chapter 11 cases.</p>

Community Outreach

Obj.#	Objective	Accomplishments/Status
1	Expand relations with minority bar associations.	No status to report.
2	Obtain funding for foreign language interpretation and translation services.	The Court's FAQs were translated into Spanish and posted on the Court's website in a project coordinated by the Debtor Assistance Project and funded by the Attorney Admissions Fund.
3	Encourage effective cross-cultural communication in the courtroom.	<p>The Court's FAQs were translated into Spanish and posted on the Court's website in a project coordinated by the Debtor Assistance Project and funded by the Attorney Admissions Fund.</p> <p>In January 2010, the Court and Public Counsel Law Center initiated steps to partner with local colleges to have volunteer Spanish translation services available at reaffirmation hearings. The project, now spearheaded by Public Counsel Law Center, has students from CSULA and the Northridge Institute of Interpretation volunteering their translation services in the Los Angeles and San Fernando Valley Divisions.</p>
4	Create bankruptcy education programs.	The Education Committee continues to arrange bankruptcy education programs for the off-site Clerk's Office seminar, quarterly judges' meetings, and for interns/law clerks.
5	Create pamphlets in Spanish available for the public on the nature of chapters 7, 11, and 13.	All bankruptcy reference materials at the Los Angeles Division and San Fernando Valley Division Self-Help Desks are available in Spanish. A Spanish translation of the Court's FAQs was also posted on the Court's website in 2009.
6	Review all information available to the public and revise it to accord with changes in the law.	Public Information QC Committee reviewed the Court's website. Some changes implemented, including a major overhaul of the FAQs. "Don't Have An Attorney?" section added to the Court's website. Project completed to modify Local Bankruptcy Rules, forms, notices, and other court documents to conform with the Statutory Time-Periods Technical Amendments Act of 2009.
7	Provide public education on issues such as separation of powers, judicial independence, rule of law, and <i>stare decisis</i> .	Encourage judges to support participation in programs sponsored by universities, law schools, bar associations, etc.
8	Update the Court's website periodically to keep it current and user-friendly.	The Court's website is updated regularly to reflect current court information and processes, public notices, judges' practices, etc. A "Contact Us" feature was added in 2010 to enhance communication between the Clerk's Office and the public, and to receive suggestions about the website from users. A major overhaul of the website to make it more user-friendly and useful is underway. The Court is making headway in making more PDF forms fillable, including bankruptcy petition forms.
9	Encourage legal assistance from <i>pro bono</i> attorneys for parties who cannot afford an attorney. (See also Facilities and Security Objective #7)	Ongoing effort with LA County Bar Association's <i>Pro Bono</i> Bankruptcy Subcommittee and other local bar associations.
10	Make electronic filing more accessible to the public.	Completed numerous ECF training sessions for members of the local and national bar. Online training modules developed to replace CM/ECF classroom training for new attorneys, as well as targeted error-prone areas and LOU. Board of Judges approved proposal to enable <i>pro bono</i> attorneys to use ECF to file petitions with either fee waiver or fee installment applications. Case Management Committee believes that in other respects, this objective is not feasible. The Court is participating in a national effort to expand electronic filing to <i>pro se</i> debtors.
Obj.#	Objective	Accomplishments/Status

Publicize appropriate means to communicate suggestions for Court rules and procedures.

In 2009, the Court initiated the Bar Advisory Board, comprised of representatives from local bar associations that provide feedback and suggestions to the Court. Judges and executive management attend local bar functions to maintain open communication. The Court continues to seek and obtain input from the public on local rules, requesting comments through public notices and the *Court News*.

Facilities and Security

Obj.#	Objective	Accomplishments/Status
1	Review divisional organization of the Court.	Following consideration of a combined Northern Division and San Fernando Valley Division to be located in Ventura County, the Court has decided not to revise its five-division structure at this time, in order to maintain accessibility and service to the public and bar. The Court worked with GSA to negotiate a new lease for the San Fernando Valley Division.
2	Create a plan for court operation in the event of a natural disaster or other catastrophe that affects all or substantial portions of the district.	<p>The Court's Continuity of Operations (COOP) team is working with fellow district agencies to coordinate agency COOP plans and recommend inter-agency policy in the event of a district-wide disaster. The agencies continue to meet to discuss preparedness issues on a monthly basis.</p> <p>The Court's COOP plan establishes policy and guidance to ensure the execution of mission essential functions in the event that an emergency in the district threatens or incapacitates operations. The plan is designed for activation in the event that conditions require the relocation of leadership and staff to an alternative facility that may be geographically removed from the affected area. The Court's COOP has the capability to be operational within 12 hours of an emergency. It is continuously revised and updated to ensure that essential court functions will be maintained under all circumstances.</p>
3	Determine the amount of space used by the Court that is necessary to serve the public.	The Space and Security Committee has merged this objective with Objective #1 above.
4	Establish a "virtual" courtroom system.	Judges Bluebond, Bufford, E. Carroll, Donovan, and Neiter were assigned a portion of the Riverside Division case filings that they heard by videoconference from their Los Angeles Division courtrooms. Judge-appointees Clarkson and Wallace will maintain chambers at the Santa Ana Division and will hear Riverside Division cases assigned to them by videoconference.
5	Establish or create technology to enable litigants to appear from wherever they are.	Judges Bluebond, Bufford, E. Carroll, Donovan, and Neiter held routine hearings on Riverside Division cases by videoconference from their Los Angeles Division courtrooms.
6	Validate efficacy of Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP) on a continuing basis.	<p>The Court's COOP plan is being updated to ensure it adheres to the latest available version/template and that it reflects the Court's current organizational structure. In addition, the COOP development/implementation team has attended several COOP workshops and validated the Court's plan with those suggested by these workshops. The Court's COOP team also drafted a COOP audit program aimed at validating and testing the information and policies currently outlined in the COOP plan.</p> <p>In 2009, local COOP training was conducted for all staff at the Winter Education Seminar.</p> <p>On May 18, the Central District participated in the National Level Exercise: Eagle Horizon (NLE10). The exercise focused on testing the Court's ability to communicate during an emergency, as well as knowledge of the chain of command and the Relocation Team's preparation of vital records and equipment needed for relocation. The outcome of this year's exercise was positive, with all notifications distributed on time with the appropriate response expected. The Operations Managers/Supervisors were able to assemble in the desired location within 10 minutes of the request and identify their vital records and relocation teams. They were all aware of the chain of command that would be used in the event of a COOP emergency.</p>

Obj.#	Objective	Accomplishments/Status
7	Explore providing space in the courthouses for providing <i>pro bono</i> legal assistance. (See also Community Outreach Objective #9)	The Los Angeles, Northern, San Fernando Valley, and Santa Ana Divisions have onsite Self-Help Desks to provide <i>pro se</i> parties with free legal information, reference material, and <i>pro bono</i> support. The Debtor Assistance Project provides <i>pro bono</i> support to <i>pro se</i> debtors prior to Reaffirmation Agreement hearings at the Los Angeles and San Fernando Valley Divisions. The Public Counsel Law Center, Orange County Bar Association, and the Orange County Bankruptcy Forum provide onsite <i>pro bono</i> assistance at the Santa Ana Division. The Legal Aid Foundation of Santa Barbara County provides onsite <i>pro bono</i> assistance at the Northern Division.
8	Make electronic locks and access to doors, elevators, and locations more universal, and limit physical keys and cipher locks.	Card readers and security cameras have been installed in the judicial chambers within the Roybal Federal Building. In 2010, the electronic locks were installed in all Roybal Building courtroom doors that open to chambers.

Human Resources

Obj.#	Objective	Accomplishments/Status
1	Evaluate and modify, if necessary, the use of the telework program. (See also Case Management Objective #7).	The Clerk's Office reviewed the telework program in 2009 and expanded the program to enable operations staff to perform quality control, case closing and dismissals from remote and alternative locations. Emergency Operations Telework program initiated to enable select Clerk's Office staff to work during non-peak hours and weekends from home to minimize the impact on CM/ECF, when necessary. The telework program was also expanded to Chambers and administrative staff. The new Operations Support Team supports the continuity of operations planning efforts by allowing team members to telework up to three days a week.
2	Ensure a smooth transition as senior staff members retire.	The Clerk's Office initiated its Career Intern program in 2007 with five interns. A new class of five interns joined the Court in 2008, and another four career interns came onboard in 2009. To manage the record filings in 2010, the Clerk's Office hired 49 new generalist clerks, and converted 43 temporary generalist clerks to permanent operations support clerks. Additional administrative staff was hired to help support the growing operations team.
3	Recruit and retain a workforce consistent with the Court's technology.	The Court continued to use different recruiting channels to recruit candidates with relevant training and experience, including utilizing online job boards and posting positions at local university campuses. A high percentage of new hires have computer skills and college degrees and/or relevant work experience, enabling these new hires to quickly become productive staff members. Employee retention continues to be high, consistent with the judiciary overall. The Clerk's Office initiated its Career Intern program in 2007 and now has eight career interns in this program. In 2010, the new Staff Development Department began developing enhanced workforce training for Court staff.
4	Enhance training for all staff.	<p>In 2010, the Court substantially increased its commitment to providing professional development opportunities to Court staff. Court staff attended 204 classes in 2010, a 38 percent increase over 2009. Court staff members participated in 5,635 hours of training, a 51 percent increase over the prior year.</p> <p>From Chambers, 104 new law clerks and externs participated in training sessions conducted by bankruptcy judges and guest speakers in January, June, and September. Overall, 76 percent of participants came from the Bankruptcy Court and the remaining participants from the District and Magistrate Court. The one-day course is designed to educate incoming law clerks and externs about the bankruptcy chapters and related topics. Upon the retirement of Judge Bufford, sponsorship of the program was transitioned to Judge Saltzman in September.</p> <p>In the past year, many Court staff members had a chance to attend offsite training sponsored by the judiciary, including the National Conference of Bankruptcy Clerks, the Bankruptcy Operational Practices Forum, and CM/ECF Dictionary Training. District-wide training sessions were held in May and June to introduce and prepare staff for the Court's new Performance Management Program. All Clerk's Office staff completed the online course, "Avoiding Ethics Pitfalls," about the Court's Code of Conduct. Operations staff used the Court's new Learning Management System to complete the online course, "Is It Legal Advice?" about legal versus procedural advice.</p> <p>In 2010, the new Staff Development department began implementing workforce training for Court staff. The department surveyed the Court to assess staff needs, and introduced a calendar of training opportunities in technology and communication. The department will also be managing the Court's "Paths to Success" Leadership Program and the orientation program for newly-hired generalist clerks.</p>

Obj.#	Objective	Accomplishments/Status
5	Develop a new employee recognition program consistent with national guidelines.	<p>In December 2010, the Court launched a new employee recognition program called Spot-on-Award for Recognition (SOAR). SOAR replaced the Court's previous employee recognition program, "ePlause," but does not replace the Court's annual cash awards program or informal recognition of employees.</p> <p>SOAR gives the Clerk's Office the opportunity to recognize an employee's contribution to the performance of a team, division, or the entire district. Awards are given based on contributions to the Court in the areas of Customer Service, Outstanding Performance, Teamwork, Suggestions, Special Acts, and Special Service. Awards are divided into three categories: monetary, non-monetary, and time-off.</p> <p>There are also custom-minted coins that are awarded directly by the Clerk of Court or Chief Judge for especially significant contributions to the Court.</p>
6	Establish a mechanism for line staff to provide feedback to management staff.	Workplace Liaison program initiated by the Clerk's Office. In 2010, commenced program to acknowledge and reward staff who propose ideas for improving the Court's efficiency.
7	Explore alternative work schedules for staff.	The Court offers telework opportunities for staff. An Emergency Telework Program was launched in 2009 to enable operations staff, with prior approval, to work evenings and weekends when necessary.
8	Implement digital time card and leave tracking/management systems.	The Court is currently reviewing an automated leave management system called ELMO, short for Electronic Leave Management Organizer. The Court plans to begin testing the system in 2011.

Information Management

Obj.#	Objective	Accomplishments/Status
1	Expand CM/ECF to all constituents.	The Court now provides online CM/ECF training modules for those interested in obtaining access to CM/ECF or improving their skills. By the end of 2010, a total of 5,752 attorneys had been registered to electronically file documents via CM/ECF, a 53 percent increase over 2009.
2	Reduce paper/printer costs.	New networked copiers were made available throughout the Court to enable duplex printing, eliminate the need for separate fax machines, and reduce toner expense. The use of PDF files that can be viewed, either from emails or from the Court's website, continues to increase (e.g., judicial committee minutes, procedural manuals, reports, newsletters, etc.). The Court studied printing practices and costs to help the Court make business decisions on how to acquire supplies and services more effectively and efficiently reduce expenses.
3	Enable <i>pro se</i> e-filing safely and in accordance with applicable laws.	Board of Judges approved proposal to enable <i>pro bono</i> attorneys to use ECF to file petitions with either fee waiver or fee installment applications. In August, the Judicial Conference's Committee on Court Administration and Case Management approved a proposal by the Bankruptcy Court Administration Division for a pilot program allowing self-represented parties to file their cases electronically.
4	Educate other bankruptcy courts regarding the benefits and advantages of CIAO! and other software developed by the court.	Judge Peter H. Carroll and members of the Clerk's Office provided an overview of CIAO! to a national panel from the AO and other courts in 2008. In 2009, a member of the Clerk's Office demonstrated CIAO! to the CM/ECF Next Generation task force. The AO ultimately decided to adopt another calendaring program, so the Court has scaled back promotional efforts behind CIAO! but continues to enhance features in CIAO! to serve the Court's own purposes.
5	Provide computer terminals in Clerk's Offices for <i>pro se</i> litigants to use for filing court documents electronically.	The Board of Judges enabled <i>pro bono</i> attorneys to electronically file petitions with fee waiver or installment applications from <i>pro se</i> debtors. In August, the Judicial Conference's Committee on Court Administration and Case Management approved a proposal by the Bankruptcy Court Administration Division for a pilot program allowing self-represented parties to file their cases electronically.
6	Enable e-filing of proofs of claim by high volume claim filers such as the IRS.	Objective completed. The Court registered the IRS and other high-volume claim filers to electronically file claims through CM/ECF.
7	Modify CIAO! so tentative rulings are easily included in the docket as findings of fact and conclusions of law in support of court findings.	No status to report.
8	Implement digital time card and leave tracking/management systems.	The Court is currently reviewing an automated leave management system called ELMO, short for Electronic Leave Management Organizer. The Court plans to begin testing the system in 2011.