

STRATEGIC PLAN

JUDICAL BRANCH OF PUERTO RICO

2020-2025

ROADMAP TO A LEADING-EDGE JUSTICE





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MESSAGE FROM THE

CHIEF JUSTICE



When I took on the position of Chief Justice in 2016 and, with it, the responsibility of presiding over the Judicial Branch, I made a commitment to develop a new justice administration guided by transparency, access and efficiency.

On that day, I humbly took on the extraordinary opportunity to serve my country from the highest judicial forum. I was—and I am now—hopeful and committed to ensure that this government branch attended to the claims and needs of the people of Puerto Rico.

The past four years have been riddled with unthinkable challenges. Hurricanes, earthquakes, our socioeconomic situation and the COVID-19 pandemic have demanded that our undertakings rise to another level and focus on making justice more accessible to those who suffer in this time of crisis. The challenges posed by Puerto Rico's current historic situation have not paralyzed us; instead, they have pushed us to seek innovation and alliances in order to do more with less.

In one year—and in face of the demands of the judicial community for the adoption of a digital system to facilitate case submission and management—we implemented *SUMAC Civil* in our thirteen Judicial Regions and we extended it to our Family Relations Courts. Under the motto "Technology for Justice," we extended the use of diverse tools, such as the videoconference project for civil cases to speed up judicial processes and promote real access to justice. Likewise, we strengthened continuing education for judges and other court officials to foster expertise and sensibility when dealing with populations in vulnerability conditions: people who, on account of their age, gender, sexual orientation, race, physical or mental state, migratory status and social, economic or other circumstances, face difficulties to fully exercise their rights before the judicial system. We also expanded educational activities and programs to provide orientation to the community on the judicial system, judicial processes and civic rights and responsibilities.

Puerto Rican Courts serve hundreds of thousands of people north, south, east and west of the Island. The highest number of cases are seen in the Court of First Instance. It is there where people go every day to present their claims and defend their rights in every aspect of social life. That is why the Judicial Branch must provide adequate access to the resources that Courts need to function effectively and efficiently. Moreover, it must use all available resources to ensure public trust in justice through

an independent and competent Judiciary that provides timely and sensible answers to further strengthen the foundations of our democracy.

To fulfill this mission, the task begins with a critical examination of courtroom operations at all levels. This allows us to identify and adopt best practices and improve or discard those that do not work. It necessarily includes obtaining critical feedback from the community we serve, because, as I expressed when I was sworn in office, it is indispensable for the proper functioning of justice. That is why I must emphasize that this plan is the result of a comprehensive process of dialogue and self-evaluation—at all levels, in all judicial regions and with the community—on crucial issues for the Judicial Power and for Puerto Rico.

In this context, we formulated the *Strategic Plan for the Judicial Branch 2020-2025: Roadmap to a Leading-Edge Justice*. Its development and implementation imply the continuity of the vision of the pillars that I embraced from the moment I took office, with the adjustments that the future demands and the aforementioned self-evaluation and collective judgement. It requires that we consider how to improve our courts in order to reform and set the course that will help us meet its objectives. This Strategic Plan becomes the instrument to guide our institution in the direction we propose and substantiate our administrative decisions. In it we define the mission of the Judicial Branch and we stamp our vision, not as the unattainable aspiration of one person or a group of persons, but as a collective vision shared by all the men and women who shape it.

In the next five years we will continue to focus on judicial excellence and efficient administration at the forefront of technological innovation, but also at the forefront on matters pertaining to human rights, such as adjudication from a gender perspective. In order to do so, we have identified priorities that will set the road we must follow, the destination we want to reach and the specific strategies and actions that we must undertake during this period. These include: efficient administration of justice characterized by productivity and the prompt resolution of cases; supporting streamlined judicial services that will optimize the task of delivering justice; education and relations with the community that will help eliminate accessibility barriers; the implementation of technology for justice to modernize and speed up judicial processes; access to justice that will truly promote access to all persons regardless of their age, gender, sexual identity, race, physical or mental state, migratory status, and social, economic or other circumstances; and strengthening judicial independence to ensure a robust judicial system that protects the fundamental rights of every person and sustains the socioeconomic development of our country.

I trust that this Strategic Plan will promote efficiency to face upcoming challenges, to focus our efforts and maximize our human and fiscal resources in order to fulfill our vision and mission. I thank all members of the Judiciary and all employees of the Judicial Branch who collaborated in this effort and who work very hard serving Puerto Rico. The Judicial Branch of Puerto Rico is the people who conform it and the people who we serve.

It is with great enthusiasm, and with the same promise with which I took on the Presidency, that I present you the Strategic Plan for the Judicial Branch of Puerto Rico 2020-2025: a renewed commitment of each and every one of us with a forefront justice for the future.

— Maite D. Oronoz Rodríguez

Chief Justice

MESSAGE FROM THE

ADMINISTRATIVE DIRECTOR OF THE COURTS

Every organization that aspires to be on the leading-edge must have a defined roadmap that stems from its purpose and from a realistic understanding of its social context, as well as its resources, strengths and needs. At the Judicial Branch of Puerto Rico, we understand our role in Puerto Rican society. We also understand the social context where we must fulfill our duties, as well as the reality we face in terms of resources, circumstances and means. And, of course, we are aware of the changes that need to be integrated in judicial operations in order to meet the needs of a world that reveals itself, more than ever, as continually changing, demanding celerity and efficiency from multiple sectors, and filled with extraordinary technological possibilities.

Efficiency in judicial undertakings entails continuous innovation in the provision of services, the education of its human capital and community, in process design and supervision. It also entails making viable the effective communication between the higher administration, the Judiciary and its personnel, as well as other agents of our justice system, academia and community, especially those sectors whose rights are at a higher risk of being neglected.

The agenda for the next five years is ambitious, but realistic. It aspires to achieve not only high levels of efficiency, but also strengthen the trust of the people in judicial institutions. To do so, it aims, on the one hand, to comply with high productivity and efficiency standards both by the Judiciary and its personnel. On the other hand, it expects to bring the Judicial Branch closer to the community it serves.



With this in mind, we are betting on technology to promote access to justice and expand services from the Judicial Branch in an immediate and efficient manner; to develop tools that facilitate supervision and accountability; to strengthen human capital; and to innovate in education projects pertaining to judicial work and its fundamentally inherent principles, such as judicial independence and impartiality.

I am convinced that the talent, determination and good will of the hundreds of persons who work in the Judicial Branch of Puerto Rico will allow us to achieve the goals set in this Strategic Plan.

— Sigfrido Steidel Figueroa
 Administrative Director
 Office of Courts Administration



This Strategic Plan, named *Roadmap to a Leading-Edge Justice*, constitutes the declaration of the public and institutional policy of the Judicial Branch of Puerto Rico, presided by Chief Justice, Hon. Maite D. Oronoz Rodríguez. As such, it is an affirmation of the Chief Justice's commitment to the people of Puerto Rico at the beginning of the third decade of the 21st Century. This Strategic Plan establishes the agenda for the next five years with a clear and enthusiastic vision of the Island in spite of the great challenges it is facing and will face.

After thorough assessment, the goals and strategies have been grouped in six (6) core areas, namely:

- Efficient Judicial Management
- Education and Relations with the Community
- Administration and Support for Judicial Service
- Technology for Justice
- Judicial Independence
- Access to Justice

Efficient Judicial Management seeks to emphasize the importance of effective adjudication to ensure that this government branch fulfills its non-transferrable function in our democracy. Therefore, this core areas will be addressed through the establishment of time standards for the resolution of controversies and the adoption of best practices in the management of judicial, administrative and operational processes in courts to ensure the optimum functioning of our judicial system and the preservation of the Rule of Law. Among other initiatives to promote best practices, efforts will be made towards strengthening and widening the education and training curriculum of the Judiciary.

Education and relations with the community seek to expand and strengthen ties between the Judiciary and the community it serves contributing to the transparency and trust that must be built for the optimum functioning of the Judicial Branch. This strategic plan proposes the strengthening of ties with the community through several initiatives, including: 1) increasing accessibility to data; 2) developing an environment and equipping spaces that will stimulate consistent exchange of ideas and experiences; 3) developing inclusive projects in courts so that the people understand the role of courts in their lives; and 4) developing skills for preventing and solving conflicts without the need for litigation.

A robust Judicial Branch requires the commitment of its employees to a form of administration that supports judicial service allowing for the fulfillment of the mission and vision of the Judicial Power and, thus, its responsibility towards the people of Puerto Rico.

Through this goal, it recognizes that the men and women who comprise the Judicial Branch and who work hand in hand with our judges are essential to the fulfilment of the objective of serving justice and solving cases efficiently and sensibly. Initiatives in this core area include, among others: 1) instrumentalization of a new performance evaluation system; 2) elaboration of standardized administrative processes; 3) identification of proper metrics to validate compliance with programmatic goals; and 4) modernization of administrative processes.

Technology for justice has been one of the pillars of the administration of Chief Justice, Hon. Maite D. Oronoz Rodríguez. This goal is based on the notion that technology is a facilitating tool for access to justice that enables access to courts and services and streamlines processes for the proper vindication of the people's rights. The proposed technological initiatives seek to ease the electronic submission and processing of all cases and affairs presented before the Courts of First Instance, the Court of Appeals and the Supreme Court. It also includes promoting virtual appearance of all parties and digital submission of oral and documental proof; expanding the videoconference system for municipal issues; and developing accessible intelligent forms regardless of users' functional diversity. Likewise, it aims at transforming data collection methods and systems to make them useful for optimal judicial, administrative and operational decision making.

Judicial independence is the cornerstone that ensures the supremacy of law as a principle which, in turn, ensures equality before the judicial system to all who resort to court to vindicate their rights. This principle is essential to the role of the Judicial Power in our democracy. It is through judicial independence that the people are assured that their Judiciary will be free from internal or external pressure or influence that may partialize the adjudication process. The initiatives to foster judicial independence will include the constant and firm defense of the Judicial Branch's budgetary autonomy, a wide discussion of the need to reform the designation of judges, and the strengthening of conditions in which service is provided to ensure the stability and safety of the Judiciary. It is also necessary to strengthen the training of the Judiciary and its employees to emphasize the impartiality and the ethical and disciplinary norms that guide all members of the Judicial Branch in the exercise of their duty. In this sense, all efforts directed towards the education of the community to promote an understanding of the importance of judicial independence and impartiality in our democracy are indispensable.

Section 1, Article II of the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico establishes that: "The dignity of the human being is inviolable". This constitutional disposition adds that all persons are equal before the law and that no discrimination shall be made on account of race, color, sex, birth, social origin or condition, or political or religious ideas. Access to justice is a corollary of this principle that demands that the right to equality established by the Bill of Rights is assured by facilitating effective access of all persons to the system of justice, especially the most vulnerable populations.

This core area incorporates international developments to attend to these populations in order to define an action plan that effectively eliminates the barriers faced by persons in different inequality situations to vindicate their rights. In March 2008, in the context of the XIV Iberian-American Judicial Summit, member countries adopted the Brasilia Regulations for effective Access to Justice for People in Vulnerable Conditions. The Brasilia Regulations are a set of one hundred rules that establish the basic standards to ensure access to justice for people in vulnerable conditions. Said Rules are articulated under the principle that the judicial system should be configured as: "an instrument for the effective defence of the rights of vulnerable people. It is of little use if the State formally recognises a right when its owner is unable to access the justice system effectively in order to exercise said right." As the guarantor of the most fundamental rights of our people, the Judicial Branch reaffirms is commitment to work for an effective justice system for all persons without distinction. As part of this commitment, it will promote procedural equality and the elimination of barriers that limit access to justice to people on account of their age, gender, nationality or functional diversity, among other factors that have historically limited their access to the institutions that must serve them. Likewise, it aims at gender equality within and outside the Judicial Branch through an integrated system that will apply gender perspective in day-to-day activities.

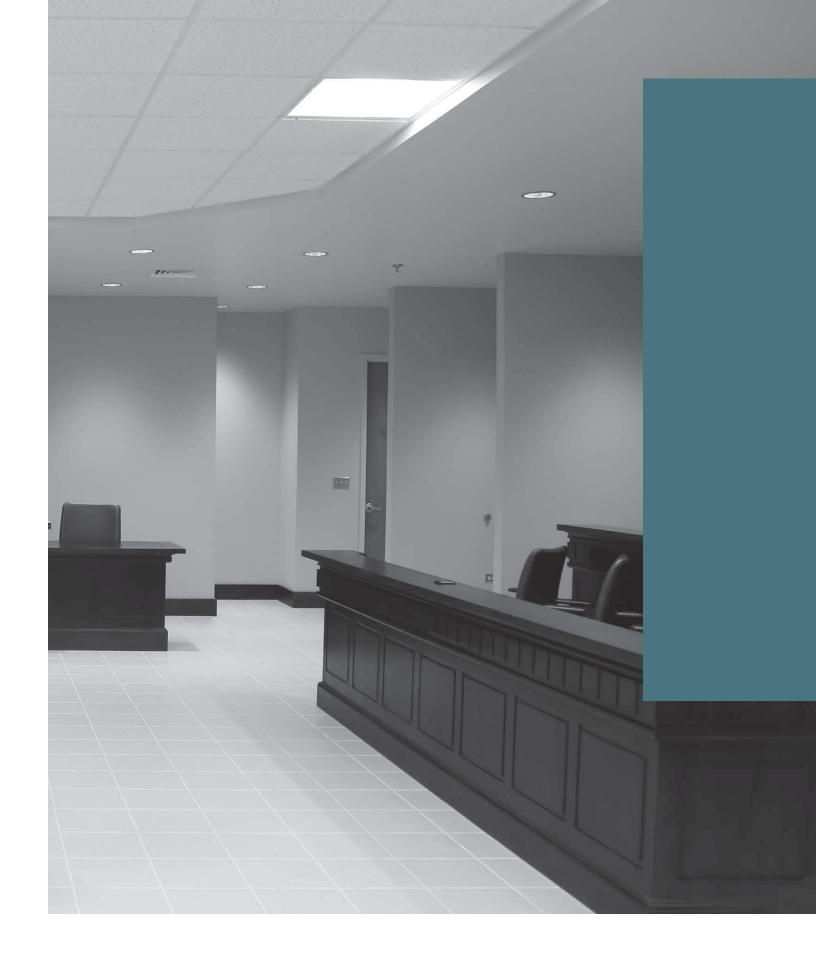
Among the strategies to achieve these goals are: 1) to expand programs directed to populations in vulnerability conditions and provide specialized and interdisciplinary management in cases of domestic violence, sexual violence, mental health and child abuse; 2) to strengthen the Centers for Conflict Mediation of the Judicial Branch; 3) to reconceptualize the orientation program for homeless people who turn to our courts to vindicate their rights without the assistance of a law professional.

Each goal and strategy under each core area is the result of critical self-examination that includes the observations and recommendations of the people. It is also the result of various consultations with members of the Judicial Branch. These consultations helped identify and prioritize institutional strengths and weaknesses as well as opportunities and challenges (FODA exercise). Work groups organized by core area took all this feedback and shaped it into preliminary goals and strategies. These were later examined before being selected, classified and drafted in their final version by the technical team which lead the entire production process of this Strategic Plan.

When judging the relevance and scope to the goals and challenges contained in this Strategic Plan, both the Mission and Vision of this institution must be taken into consideration. Our mission it that the Judicial Branch imparts justice through attention to cases, controversies and conflicts brought before it with independence, diligence, sensibility and impartiality ensuring the rights and freedom of the people as established in the Constitution and the Law. The vision for the future of the institution requires that it is accessible, diligent and expeditious, sensible, independent, efficient and innovative, committed to the people and trustworthy.

Considering the goals and strategies contained in this Plan, it is clear to see that for the next five years the Judicial Branch of Puerto Rico will work on an ambitious agenda that must be executed with flexibility and creativity to fulfill its objectives in spite of challenges stemming from budget allocation, emergencies or our changing socioeconomic reality. The greatest challenge will be to attain these goals within Puerto Rico's current reality, but with the commitment to listen to the legitimate claims of a society that demands quality, innovation, transparency, equality and sensibility from its institutions.

Pursuant to this goal, this Strategic Plan aims at mapping the road to a leading-edge justice sustained by the best ideas and the determination of the thousands of men and women who form the Judicial Branch of Puerto Rico.



MISSION

To impart justice and decide cases, controversies, and disputes with independent criteria, diligence, sensitivity, and impartiality, guaranteeing the constitutional rights and freedoms of the People.

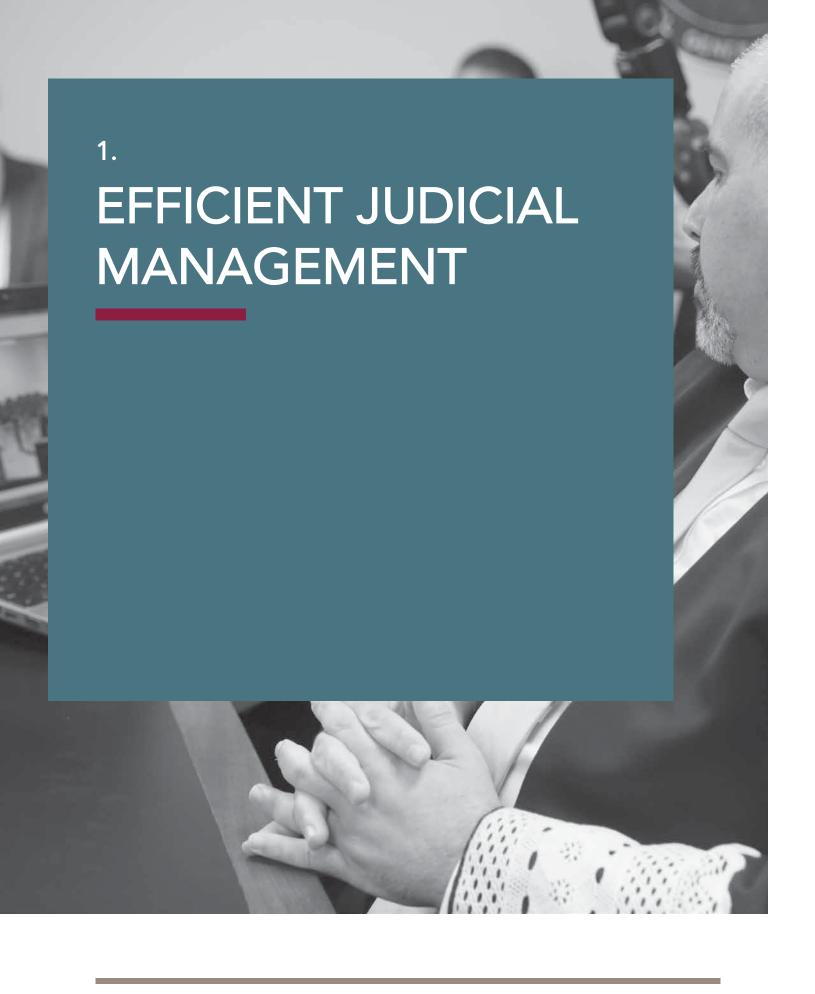
VISION

The Judicial Branch will be accessible to all, diligent in the adjudication of matters, sensitive to social issues, innovative in the provision of services, committed to administrative excellence and to its human capital, and deserving of the people's trust.









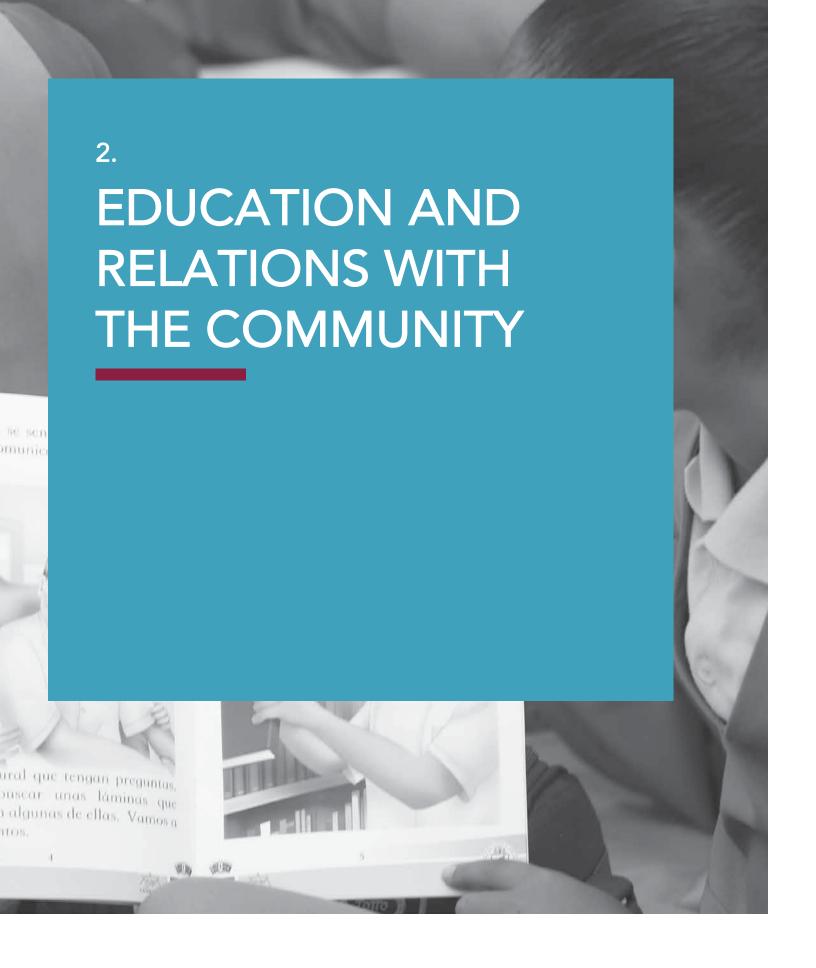
Achieving excellence in judicial service is the duty of all members of the Judiciary because the prompt and effective administration of justice strengthens the people's trust in their justice system and consolidates the democratic bases of our society.

1.1. Foster the prompt and diligent attention of judicial matters to contribute to democracy and socioeconomic development in Puerto Rico.

- Elaborate and implement quality and time standards for judicial, administrative and operational processes in courts.
- Promote effective practices in judicial management emphasizing management of the judicial calendar, and case control and follow-up as well as task distribution and supervision of the personnel supporting judicial service for prompt controversy resolution.
- Procure optimum distribution of cases in the judges' calendars in order to promote prompt and adequate attention to and resolution of controversies.
- Incorporate and update technological and communication tools for judicial activity and essential administrative and operational support activities.
- Standardize processes in the Court of First Instance to facilitate assessment and evaluation of its performance.
- Continue developing guides for standardized case management and other operations at the Court of First Instance.
- Promote referral of cases to alternative methods of conflict resolution that speed up judicial processes.
- Promote integrated services through coordination with government and non-government entities to unite and unify efforts to serve justice.

12 Promote efficiency and quality in judicial management by strengthening education and training of the Judiciary.

- Provide curricula for the education and training of the Judiciary that adequately combine theory and practice, aids in the application of Law to our social reality and offers proper tools for optimum performance.
- Design compulsory curricula for the Judiciary that emphasize the Judicial Code of Ethics mandate pertaining to promptness and efficiency.
- Design training and other educational activities to foster the ability of the Judiciary to apply gender perspective and sensibility to the claims of the most vulnerable populations.
- Strengthen the Judiciary through the development of writing skills, effective use of legal investigation techniques and new technological tools to speed up judicial processes and to optimize the development of other skills.
- Promote dialogue and the exchange of ideas and experiences between members of the Judiciary to promote best practices in controversy adjudication.
- Enable the holistic formation of judges through the discussion of legal, social and cultural issues.
- Reformulate the mentoring system so that senior judges mentor newly designated judges.
- Strengthen relations and alliances with U. S. and Latin American judiciary academies to promote the exchange of ideas and academic enrichment.



The development of a collaborative relation with the community helps eliminate access barriers to justice due to lack of knowledge of the judicial function or lack of proper information.

21. Build a relation of trust between the Judicial Branch and the community.

- Foster the relation between the Judicial Branch and the community by creating spaces for dialogue and developing inclusive projects.
- Establish and maintain mechanisms, through diverse means, that enable continuous and productive communication with the community.
- Promote availability and proximity of the Judicial Power with the community by maximizing the use of means of communication.
- Increase access to information and data pertaining to the activities of the Judicial Branch.
- Promote a use of language that is clear and easy to understand for everyone.

22 Promote the development of an empowered and participative community that knows, understands and uses the court system to solve legal issues.

- Establish educational projects on the composition, functioning, services and processes of the Judicial Branch that effectively instruct the community.
- Develop educational strategies for diverse contents to adequately meet the specific needs of the community.
- Maximize the use of court facilities and the knowledge and skills of the Judicial Branch personnel to adequately inform, guide and educate the community.

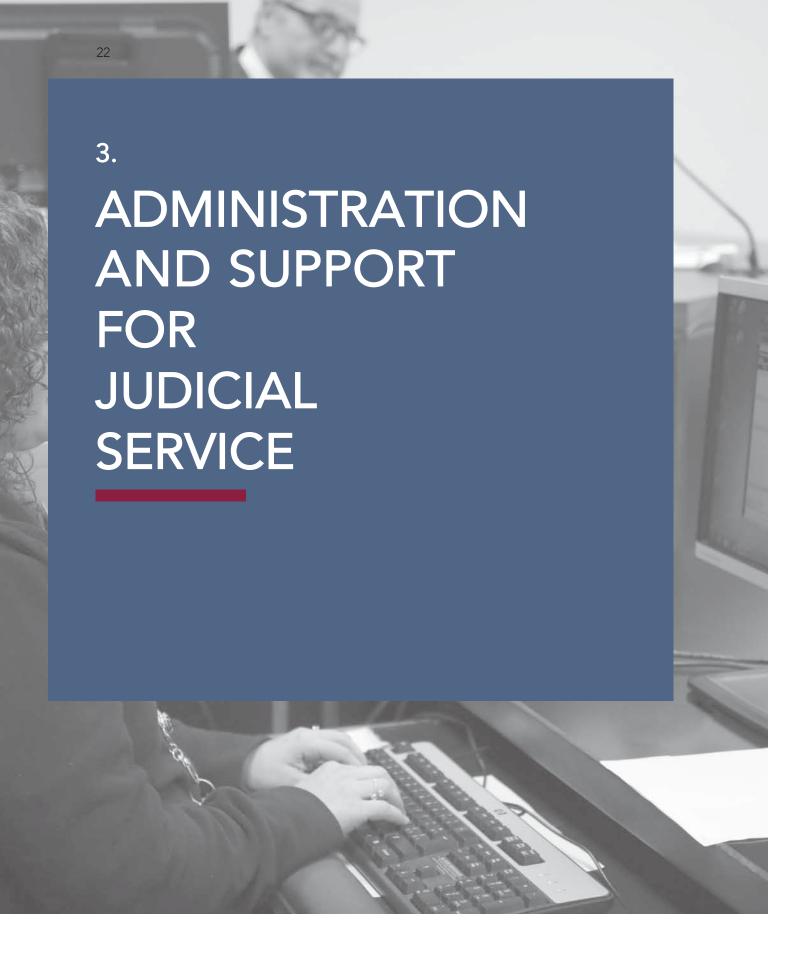
 Promote alliances with groups or entities with strategic roles that enable the development of educational projects with a multiplying effect in the community.

23. Foster knowledge and the use of alternative methods for conflict resolution without judicial intervention in the community.

- Design educational strategies that allow every person, including leaders and students, to develop the necessary skills and capacities to prevent, avoid and solve conflicts in their communities.
- Promote access to alternative methods for conflict resolution in communities.

24. Contribute to the continuous education and training of professionals who intervene in judicial processes.

- Strengthen and expand internship and supervised practice programs in the Judicial Power.
- Develop continuous education activities and educational materials that contribute to the optimum performance of professionals who intervene in judicial processes.



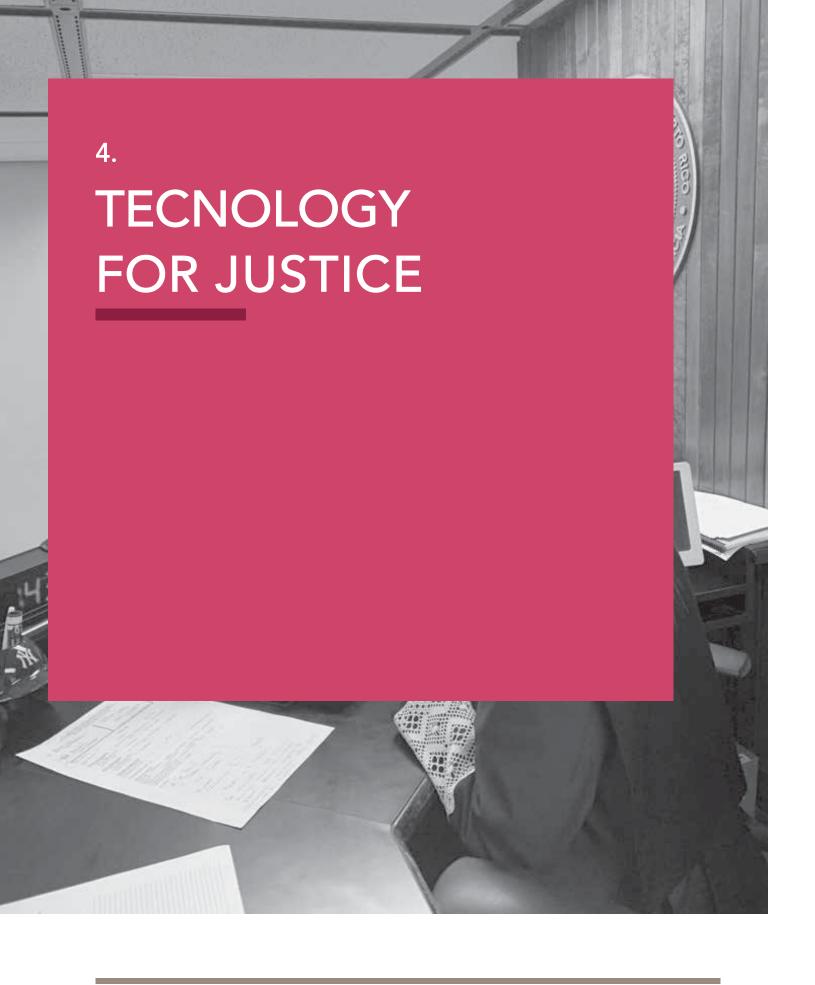
To fully accomplish the mission of the Judicial Branch to promptly resolve cases and controversies and to ensure the people's rights, requires the optimization of all available human, material and economic resources.

31. Foster a trained and motivated work force in a flexible, agile and efficient working environment.

- Assess and update the work force with evolving technology and knowledge of the needs for service in order to maximize talent and optimize judicial services.
- Innovate regulations pertaining to human resources to redefine operations and offerings according to the needs for service.
- Develop potential for leadership and administrative skills among support personnel to achieve effective management of judicial processes.
- Foster the development of human capital by strengthening their sense of service, commitment, empathy and change.
- Promote wellbeing, motivation and holistic development of human resources.
- Provide continuing education and training through technology and innovative education techniques.
- Foster effective organizational communication at all levels.
- Implement a new performance assessment system to measure efficiency and develop a workplan to strengthen skills and acknowledge best practices.

32 Optimize administrative and operational processes.

- Implement a work culture oriented towards prompt and efficient service for those who go to courts to vindicate their rights.
- Design standardized administrative processes to coherently and adequately support judicial service.
- Define and implement metrics to validate processes and assess compliance with the goals of the programs and services of the Judicial Branch.
- Update current regulations to modernize administrative processes in accordance with organizational needs.
- Implement digitalization and digital archive systems to generate economies in the preservation of judicial documents and facilitate access.
- Optimize the use of facilities of the Judicial Branch.
- Ensure that the implementation of the Strategic Plan relies on all necessary human and material resources.



Technology is an effective tool to eliminate barriers that limit access to courts.

4.1. Provide effective and innovative technological platforms to attend to judicial processes.

- Expand electronic submission and processing of all cases and issues presented before the Court of First Instance both at the municipal and superior level as well as appeals presented before the Court of Appeals and the Supreme Court of Puerto Rico.
- Expand the use of technological platforms for the electronic submission and processing of cases by independent litigators with the purpose of providing guick and continuous access to judicial documents.
- Create rooms for intelligent sessions using state-of-theart technology that allows virtual appearance as well as digital submission of oral and documentary evidence.

42 Create simple electronic mechanisms to ensure that every person has access to judicial processes.

- Expand the videoconference system to the thirteen judicial regions and extend its use to municipal affairs and to other stages of judicial procedures to reduce litigation costs, minimize hearing suspensions and facilitate appearance of parties, witnesses and legal representatives.
- Develop intelligent forms as a mechanism of access to justice for everyone.
- Ensure that all implemented technological applications and platforms comply with accessibility standards for persons with functional diversity.

43. Modernize data collection methods and systems.

- Define information needs and identify standards to collect reliable statistical data using advanced technological tools.
- Automatize and standardize data entry in information systems.
- Update data collection systems for adequate and informed managerial decision making and to speed up judicial, administrative and operational matters.

44. Modernize information systems and infrastructure so that they are more robust and flexible.

- Strengthen the information and telecommunication systems infrastructure of the Judicial Branch for ease of use by internal and external users.
- Continually assess technological tools to ensure that they speed up the judicial and administrative processes for which they were adopted.



Ensuring a judicial system that protects the fundamental rights of every person and maintains the necessary social order for life in society requires an independent Judicial Branch with the ability to solve cases and controversies within the Law not allowing personal, economic or political interests, public pressure or individual perceptions influence judges' decisions and actions.

51. Reinforce mechanisms and tools to protect judicial independence.

- Promote the allocation of an adequate budget that ensures judicial operation.
- Defend the budgetary autonomy of the Judicial Branch and reestablish the statutory provision that determines its budget to ensure a clear separation of powers avoiding financial dependence.
- Foster and participate in the discussions on how to strengthen the process of designating judges to form a robust Judiciary composed of the island's best jurists with solid experience and academic formation as well as the ethical values needed for the impartation of justice.
- Strengthen service conditions to ensure the stability and security of the Judiciary.

52 Strengthen the ethical commitment of the Judiciary and its personnel.

- Strengthen the formation and evaluation of judges on issues pertaining to their duty, especially on judicial ethics.
- Develop personnel training on judicial Independence, impartiality and ethics.

- Create the means to provide judges with proper orientation on the scope of ethical and disciplinary norms that guide their actions.
- Strengthen internal mechanisms to prevent and eliminate improper practices in public service.

53. Educate the community on the importance and scope of the principles of judicial independence and impartiality that guarantee the essential rights of the people.

- Increase the participation of human resources from the Judicial Branch in public and private schools to offer orientation on the importance of judicial independence and impartiality.
- Develop communication spaces to educate the people on the role that courts play in their lives and the island and emphasize the importance of the principles of judicial Independence and impartiality.



The Judicial Branch must ensure effective access to justice and courts to all who on account of their age (minors or young adults) gender identity, physical or mental condition, social, ethnic, racial or economic circumstances face barriers to assert their rights.

6.1. Provide procedural equity and eliminate barriers that limit access to justice to people in vulnerability conditions.

- Expand the scope of work plans and programs directed to attend to the needs of populations in vulnerability conditions.
- Optimize the collection of statistics that aid in informed decision making and effectively facilitate access to justice.
- Identify the necessary collaborations with government, non-profit and community-based organizations to eliminate barriers that limit access to justice and courts to people in vulnerability conditions.
- Expand programs that successfully provide specialized and interdisciplinary case management in domestic violence, sexual violence, mental health and child abuse cases
- Reconceptualize orientation programs for people with low income that appear in court so that they can effectively represent themselves or, when appropriate, be referred to pro bono services.
- Implement technological tools that ease the process of filling out and submitting forms to obtain a service, initiate or advance a judicial procedure.
- Expand remote services to eliminate geographical and transportation barriers in order to facilitate and increase prompt access to courts and reduce costs and excessive procedural hardship for parties, witnesses or victims.
- Innovate in the use of technology to ensure access to courts and judicial services to all people with functional diversity.
- Establish mechanisms and programs that specifically attend to the needs of the young and elderly who take part in a judicial process.
- Establish strategic alliances to provide immigrants with proper guidance on their fundamental rights and available judicial services to enable access to courts regardless of migratory status.

• Ensure that all official forms of the Judicial Branch are written in a clear and non-discriminatory language that reflects social diversity.

62 Ensure gender equality in the Judicial Branch.

- Ensure gender equality in all judicial activities.
- Promote adjudication with gender perspective.
- Promote the use of inclusive language in all official documents.
- Perform studies and reports to detect discriminatory conducts and implicit biases hindering an administration of justice that is free of discrimination and draft concrete action plans based on facts.

63. Strengthen the Centers for Conflict Mediation of the Judicial Branch so that people rely on a non-adversative alternative for conflict resolution.

- Promote the elimination of cultural and socioeconomic barriers that limit effective access to justice to groups in vulnerability conditions and provide them with conflict resolution alternatives with multisector alliances.
- Standardize referral processes to the Centers for Conflict Mediation before and during judicial procedures.
- Establish metrics to assess the effectiveness of the Centers for Conflict Mediation and the services they provide to populations in vulnerability conditions.

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