

Delivering our Message:
Court Communication Plan for the Judicial Branch
YEAR THREE REPORT

Prepared by: Florida Supreme Court Public Information Office

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Year Three Implementation Report

Background:

Delivering Our Message / Court Communication Plan for the Judicial Branch of Florida took effect in January 2016 after unanimous approval by the Florida Supreme Court in late 2015. The plan was developed with input from judges, court public information officers, and other court staff from all around the state. The plan was proposed to the Court by the Judicial Management Council, an advisory body that includes judges, lawyers, and non-lawyers. The JMC designed a plan to help Florida's courts, no matter what their size or local attributes, improve communications with all audiences.

Implementing the plan today involves court staff in the 20 Judicial Circuits, five District Courts of Appeal, the Florida Supreme Court and the Office of the State Courts Administrator. Most are members of a statewide non-profit education group, the [Florida Court Public Information Officers](#) (FCPIO). Members and other court staff meet annually for an education meeting. Meetings cover a variety of topics including public information, court communications, crisis communications, emergency preparation and response, communication planning, social media, media relations, web content, education and outreach, and other timely topics. FCPIO holds regular monthly conference calls to foster collaboration to advance goals outlined in the plan.

YEAR THREE: DELIVERING OUR MESSAGE

The Year Three Implementation Report focuses on community outreach efforts to educate the public about the role courts play in society. As directed by the Communication Plan, this third annual report on implementation of the plan draws on the assessments of Florida’s court Public Information Officers. In June 2019, the PIOs described their court’s outreach efforts, including successful educational programs and innovations implemented during 2018. The purpose of the survey is to better understand the impact of the plan by examining outreach efforts by courts across the state.



Video [7 minutes]

[Watch this video highlighting Year 3 Achievements](#)

Outreach Efforts:

Courts across Florida continue to improve local community outreach programs. Since implementation of the plan, courts report an increase in tours, creation of new programs for adults and innovative technology, and web-based opportunities that engage the public. Judges and court staff understand the importance of improving outreach to the public and local communities and continuously look to improve their court’s efforts. Outreach was a major theme of the plan in Year Three.

The chart below indicates types of community outreach courts conduct and the number of courts (out of 26 jurisdictions) that indicated involvement.

Type of Community Outreach Programs	Number of Circuits/Courts
Tours for Student Groups	22
Judges Visiting Schools/Classrooms	20
Tours for Adults	17
Speaker’s Bureau	12
Evening Programs for the Public	7
Vodcasts or Videos	5
Twitter Town Hall	1
Other	10

Here is a selection of comments from courts about their outreach activities. Please note these are not comprehensive, but are representative.

- We accommodate every group, no matter how large or small, whether it's during the day or in the evening, when it comes to presentations on the judicial system or programs at our courthouses. We also make ourselves available off site.
- In addition to tours and in-person outreach, we also have a newsletter that is shared with the public and our stakeholders. We updated and created brochures to be displayed in the courthouse.
- The Classroom to Courtroom program brings a legal/Judicial Branch curriculum to approximately 2,500 7th graders each year, to include tours, juvenile court observation, and mock trials.
- Evening educational programs for the public are held on a regular basis. Topics include small claims, landlord-tenant, and simplified dissolution of marriage clinics.
- We have developed an integrated approach to community outreach programs. Events are usually posted on social media pages and/or streamed on our streaming channel.
- Our office produces traditional outreach content in newsletters, social media, web content and informational material for legislative communications in support of Supreme Court-approved issues and judicial legislative team efforts.
- In concert with other agencies, our court held two driver license clinics, designed to help members of the public restore their driving privileges.
- In our county, one of our judges participates in an initiative to educate foreign dignitaries on our court system when they visit the local Air Force base.
- Media workshops for local new organizations.
- The Bench and the Bar gather monthly at our main court facility and at least quarterly at our North and South County facilities for “Java with Judges”, which is a fun, casual coffee hour designed to foster relationships and dialogue between the judiciary and members of the bar.
- We hosted and facilitated student mock trial competitions and some of our judges participated in the Great American Teach-In.
- Traveling oral arguments at universities, colleges, and high schools.
- In partnership with the local ABOTA (American Board of Trial Advocates) chapter, we brought more than a dozen high schools (and more than 300

students) to experience oral arguments, speak with the attorneys, and meet with the judges following court. The program has grown each year and the local ABOTA chapter is now seeking to expand the program to chapters across Florida.

- The Court hosts and participates in two appellate seminars per year, sponsored by the local bar association.
- Our courthouse is open twice a year on Saturdays to welcome visitors unable to tour the building during regular business hours during the week.

Educational Promotions:

Year Three saw the expanded use of social media to promote national and state-level events. An educational promotion is a targeted effort to recognize or highlight a specific topic or event (e.g. Constitution Day, Adoption Day). Using social media to promote or recognize such events provides an opportunity for courts to engage the public on a larger scale. The impact of such promotions is far-reaching because courts can affect hundreds to thousands of people beyond their local courthouse using social media platforms.

Social media posts highlighted local events at the courthouse or recognized the topic by observing its importance to courts and the judicial branch. The chart below indicates the most popular type of promotion courts engaged in and the number of courts (out of 26 jurisdictions) that indicated involvement.

Type of Educational Promotion	Number of Circuits/Courts
Law Day/Week	23
Adoption Day	16
Take Your Child to Work Day	14
Constitution Day	9
Veteran’s Day	8
Juror Appreciation Day	8
National Judicial Outreach Week	8
Election Day	3

The Education Committee of FCPIO created a calendar of educational promotion opportunities for courts to use. See [Appendix A](#) below.



Video [5 minutes]

[Watch this video highlighting court social media posts](#)

Primary Communication Goal:

Looking ahead, courts were asked to indicate their key communication goal for 2019.

- Long awaited revision of the website and the addition of a Facebook account.
- We've already accomplished two — using Twitter and YouTube.
- To revamp the website and make it easier for people to find information with a fresh new look.
- Create an Instagram account; increase use of social media.
- Train bailiffs and court staff on first amendment and media access.
- Reach out to community partners to promote awareness about key court issues, such as businesses paying their employees who are serving as jurors.
- Evening educational programs for the public — I have submitted a curriculum for a community education program to our local public community college.
- This fall we hope to create educational videos (small claims, DV, landlord/tenant, jury, etc.) for our website.
- Continue to publicize the good work of the court.
- Further video production using the tools utilized in the self-represented litigation series.
- Our primary goal in 2019 is to continue to refresh our court communications by creating a new administrative order for the media, updating our website, and perhaps broadening our usage of social media.
- We will continue to enhance our website with updated information to help employees, local attorneys, and the public navigate the court system.
- Improving internal communications.

- To engage the public more to promote education about the courts and its programs.
- Continuation of Twitter and Facebook. We use Twitter for operation/official business information and Facebook for the "soft" news.
- On boarding a full-time media specialist and using the new position to improve presence on social media and implement quarterly outreach trainings and events.
- Reestablishing the Communications Committee.
- Creating greater opportunities for judges and staff to engage with the community.
- Exploring other Social Media platforms that may be suitable for the Circuit.
- Our primary goal for 2019 is to continue to promote our mission and vision by improving court accessibility through outreach and technological innovation.
- Increase social media efforts to inform the public about our important work. Our chief judge plans to host many special events, including Take Your Children to Work Days; a legal clinic for veterans; and a legal clinic and special docket to help citizens get back their drivers' licenses.
- Adding a Resource Development Department as way to enhance our services to meet the needs of staff and strengthen community relations.
- Prepared for crisis communication in the event they are needed
- An ongoing goal is to expand social media content, but dedicated staff is needed. This is budget-dependent but is a standing request each year.

Communication Challenges:

As indicated in the [Year Two Implementation Report](#), courts are doing what they can to support the plan, however, due to resource constraints, many courts are restricted to the bare minimum; mostly performing public information duties when needed. Six circuits (Sixth, Seventh, 11th, 13th, 17th, and 20th), the Florida Supreme Court, and the OSCA employ full-time, dedicated personnel to handle public-information duties. The supreme court and the 11th Judicial Circuit have offices with more than one position. Fourteen circuits divide PIO duties among staff and work within limited resources to handle media and public relations, education and outreach, publication and social media content creation. In the DCAs, each marshal serves as PIO for the court.

The survey asked PIOs to indicate the top three communication challenges in their court. The chart below indicates their answers.

Top Communication Challenges	Percent
Staffing / Resources	77%
Competing Priorities	73%
Finding Time for PIO duties	65%
Lack of Resources (other than staffing)	19%
Too many ideas to implement	19%

Overall, Florida’s court PIOs are optimistic about their efforts to continue implementing the communication plan based on how they rate the achievements their courts made in 2018. On a scale of 1-10, the average rating was an 8.

Recognizing the Work of Florida PIOs

Each year during its annual meeting, the Florida Court Public Information Officers organization recognizes courts or individuals who work to advance court



FCPIO Award Recipients: (l-r) Robyn Gable, Justice Kogan, Judge Dugan, Michelle Kennedy (FCPIO President), and Amber Baggett.

communications. The Award for Excellence in Communications recognizes improvements or innovations that advance the goals of the Communication Plan and increase the public’s understanding of Florida’s court system and the judicial process. Award recipients demonstrate excellence, commitment, and dedication to the field of court communications.

The 2019 Award for Excellence in Communications recipients were:

- 14th Judicial Circuit Office of Court Administration: Robyn Gable (Trial Court Administrator) and Amber Baggett (Court Operations Consultant).** The Fourteenth Circuit’s Office of Court Administration was awarded for their outstanding public service and work during Hurricane Michael by successfully communicating news and information about the courts with the public, attorneys, judges, and employees under difficult and ever-changing circumstances.

Also recognized for communication achievements were:

1. Former Florida Chief Justice Gerald Kogan (Lifetime Achievement Award), who during his tenure as chief justice from 1996 to 1998, was the first leader of the state courts system to recognize the crucial role that court communications would play in the 21st century.

2. Judge David Dugan (Judicial Outreach Award) from the 18th Judicial Circuit for exemplifying judicial outreach through his dedication to community service over the last two decades.

CONCLUSION: DELIVERING OUR MESSAGE

As stated in the [Year One Implementation Report](#), Florida's courts have taken the Communication Plan very seriously and accomplished a great deal since 2016. Each year court PIOs rely on their annual education meeting to improve their skills and deepen their knowledge in communicating effectively with the public, the media, and all court audiences. The [2019 FCPIO agenda](#) is proof that this effort continues.

Appendix A
Created by FCPIO Education Committee

MONTH *Educational Opportunities*

<i>January</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Stalking Awareness Month (Safety Tips) - Human Trafficking Awareness Day (January 11) - Day of Service / Courts Closed (MLK) (no fundraising events)
<i>February</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Black History Month
<i>March</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Women’s History Month - Florida Statehood Day (March 3) - International Women’s Day (March 8)
<i>April</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sexual Assault Awareness Month - Child Abuse Awareness Month - Earth Day (April 22) (Green Initiatives) - Take Your Child to Work Day
<i>May</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Juror Appreciation Week (coincides with Law Day) - Law Week (First week in May) - Law Day (May 1) - National Drug Court Month - Mental Health Awareness Month - Military Appreciation (Memorial Day)
<i>June</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hurricane Season – Be Prepared - Flag Day (June 14)
<i>July</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pretrial, Probation, and Parole Supervision Week (collaboration / cooperation) - Independence Day (July 4) - Courts closed
<i>August</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - First Day of School - Family Day (first Sunday in August)
<i>September</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Constitution Day (September 17) - Courts closed - National Podcast Day (September 30)
<i>October</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Civility Month – promote teen court - Mediation Week (3rd week in October) – what is mediation - Mental Illness Awareness Week (first week of the month) – problem solving court

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Domestic Violence Awareness Month (link to judges on DV bench) - Bosses Day
<i>November</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Adoption Month - Veterans Day (November 11) – highlight veterans court or judges who served - Courts Closed
<i>December</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bill of Rights Day (Dec 15) - Courts Closed

Suggestions:

- Promote a positive image of the judiciary, the court’s perspective or an educational aspect: highlight impact on the court, court services offered, training or education of judges, by the numbers, etc.
- Highlight collaboration / cooperation
- Be cautious about how you highlight an “awareness” month issue. Link to services offered by your court. Do not promote an issue, a “side” or an organization.
- Think: how does this look to the public, the media, the legislature?
- If a post could be interpreted negatively or inappropriately, STOP
- Always consult with your TCA and chief judge