

A golden scale of justice stands in the center of the image, its pans hanging from a decorative beam. The background is a blurred library with bookshelves filled with books. The lighting is warm and focused on the scale.

# STRATEGIC PLAN 2025-2029

United States Bankruptcy Court  
Central District of California





*“Strategy is a style of thinking, a conscious and deliberate process, an intensive implementation system, the science of ensuring future success.”*

*—Pete Johnson*




Photo: 6th Street Bridge Downtown Los Angeles

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*“True peace is not merely the absence of tension; it is the presence of justice.”*

*—Martin Luther King, Jr.*



# Mission, Vision, and Values

## Our Mission

To serve the most populous and diverse judicial district in the country by providing bankruptcy relief, fair and impartial justice, and a prompt and efficient resolution of disputes.

## Our Vision

The United States Bankruptcy Court for the Central District of California will be aligned with the public's needs and future trends and will be a model of exemplary service with expert and resourceful employees.

## Our Values

- Respect
- Integrity
- Diversity
- Exceptional Service
- Innovation
- Collaboration
- Education





*“Justice is conscience, not a personal conscience but the conscience of the whole of humanity.”*

*—Alexander Solzhenitsyn*



Photo: Temecula Vineyard

# Summary of the Plan

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This plan defines the strategic direction for the United States Bankruptcy Court for the Central District of California from 2025 through 2029. The Court will focus on the following four fundamental issues to achieve specific and measurable results:

- Issue 1: Enabling Broad Access to the Court
- Issue 2: Fair and Effective Court Operations
- Issue 3: Judiciary Workforce of the Future
- Issue 4: A Flexible and Responsive Infrastructure





*“Justice cannot be for one side alone but must be for both.”*

*—Eleanor Roosevelt*

Photo: Santa Barbara Marina



# Issue 1 - Enabling Broad Access to the Court

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**Issue Description.** How can the Court assist individuals and businesses that need bankruptcy relief or need to respond to a bankruptcy filing? How can the Court provide debtors, creditors, businesses, and attorneys access to the Court and its resources? How can the Court ensure open and frequent communication with and education of the bar in the age of remote hearings and less in-person contact?

## GOAL 1.1: OUTREACH FOR INDIVIDUALS

*Ensure that individuals know how to appropriately access bankruptcy resources*

### Strategies:

- Expand outreach and education about attorney referrals, self-help desks, website resources, and financial literacy, as well as unethical bankruptcy petition preparers
- Enhance and improve the Court's website and social media presence for maximum effectiveness
- Increase outreach to underserved communities and partner with organizations such as educational institutions, charities, houses of worship, uniformed services, groups with potentially vulnerable populations, and other governmental organizations
- Support and facilitate self-help centers and pro bono programs throughout the District
- Expand language support to Clerk's Office staff including during the intake process

## GOAL 1.2: OUTREACH FOR BUSINESSES

*Ensure that businesses know how to appropriately access bankruptcy resources*

### Strategies:

- Have sufficient outreach and public education to ensure that businesses in financial distress are aware of bankruptcy laws, referral resources, and bankruptcy-related fraudulent schemes
- Identify, investigate, and address known barriers that prevent small businesses from accessing Court resources
- Maintain and develop relationships with a diverse range of organizations, community groups, and bar associations
- Study the existing business bankruptcy procedures to see whether there are barriers to business access





Photo: Mission San Fernando Rey de Espana in Mission Hills

## GOAL 1.3: OUTREACH TO ATTORNEYS

*Ensure that attorneys know how to appropriately access bankruptcy resources*

### Strategies:

- Encourage greater judge participation in bench bar meetings
- Make efforts to educate the bar regarding Court procedures for in-person, remote, and hybrid hearings
- Create opportunities for informal non-case related communication and education with the bar regarding the improvement of the judicial process and Court operations
- Continue with *The Central Guide* sessions and explore other opportunities for training



The image shows the interior of the Bradbury Building in Los Angeles, featuring multiple levels of ornate, dark metal staircases with intricate railings. The building's structure is made of red brick, and the space is filled with natural light from large windows. A semi-transparent white box is overlaid on the upper portion of the image, containing a quote and its attribution.

*"Equity is the soul of law."*

*—John Bouvier*

Photo: Bradbury Building in Los Angeles



# Issue 2 - Fair and Effective Court Operations

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**Issue Description.** How can the Court continue to take into consideration the circumstances and needs of a wide variety of parties and professionals? How can the Court continue to enhance effective operations? How should the Court continue to operate effectively so that cases are heard and ruled on promptly? How can the Court continue to expand on the fairness and effectiveness of how parties and professionals interact with the Court?

## GOAL 2.1: NON-DISCRIMINATION

*Deliver justice that is impartial and fair, regardless of financial circumstances, English proficiency, race, color, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, pregnancy, religion, age, or disability*

### Strategies:

- Ensure that the Court's website has multi-functional navigational tools for all individuals
- Promote the education of judges and Court personnel on issues of inclusion, diversity, equity, accessibility, implicit bias, cultural literacy, and barriers indigent litigants face when accessing our courthouses
- Consider the adverse impact on parties or professionals with limited financial resources when developing procedures
- Facilitate in-person and remote access to Court proceedings for all individuals, including improved accessibility

## GOAL 2.2: CLEAR AND UNDERSTANDABLE INFORMATION AND PROCEDURES

*Enhance procedures and forms to be clear and responsive to the needs of litigants*

### Strategies:

- Streamline forms, rules, and other resources
- Provide information in common languages spoken in the District
- Strive to limit variances and effectively communicate unique procedural requirements
- Develop mechanisms to improve proceedings involving non-English-speaking individuals and others with communication barriers, including the expanded use and funding of interpreter and translator tools and services
- Continue to develop and update informational materials and media for Court users
- Expand the availability of automated Court information and data to the public and staff
- Encourage judges to provide sufficient explanation for litigants to understand rulings





Photo: Downtown Santa Ana

## GOAL 2.3: INFORMED JUDGING

*Ensure judges have the resources to make informed decisions*

### Strategies:

- Promote educational opportunities and access to the latest developments in the law and training for judges and staff
- Provide accurate and timely procedures and rules to judges and staff
- Ensure Court procedures remain in compliance with relevant statutes, rules, and policies
- Record Court proceedings accurately and completely to ensure that high-quality transcripts and audio recordings are readily accessible
- Provide resources and training on strategies for effectively dealing with litigants who may have physical or mental health challenges



## GOAL 2.4: COST-EFFECTIVENESS

*Investigate low-cost or no-cost ways to resolve disputes*

### Strategies:

- Support and encourage the use of alternative dispute resolution procedures
- Develop clear procedures for remote appearances
- Evaluate and implement systems to broaden availability of self-help resources
- Expand self-represented litigants' access to information

## GOAL 2.5: ASSESS AND ENHANCE CASE MANAGEMENT PROCEDURES

*Improve case management procedures as needed to increase satisfaction for all user groups*

### Strategies:

- Maximize system performance to process and review Court documents in a timely manner
- Streamline and simplify case management policies, procedures, and practices
- Identify and implement enhancements to calendaring and order upload programs to provide more efficient processes and additional management tools
- Review and enhance the use of digital systems in courthouses

## GOAL 2.6: SELF-REPRESENTED ACCESS TO TECHNOLOGY

*Ensure that self-represented litigants are provided with easier access to the Court through technology*

### Strategies:

- Improve the Court's website resources and access for self-represented litigants by making information more user-friendly and accessible
- Enhance functionality and ease of use of electronic submissions
- Encourage electronic submissions where compliant with Court Rules
- Seek ways to expand use of eSR



## GOAL 2.7: NON-ATTORNEY SERVICES

*Ensure non-attorney assistance is cost-effective, appropriate, and professional for litigants*

### Strategies:

- Monitor and work to eliminate abusive and fraudulent conduct by bankruptcy petition preparers, applicants and agents for unclaimed funds, and other parties
- Study new and emerging research and initiatives on the effective and legal use of non-attorney assistance

## GOAL 2.8: SYSTEMIC IMPROVEMENT

*Review, design, and implement judicial best practices and partner with individuals, bar associations, educational institutions, and other organizations to share data and information to help improve the bankruptcy system as well as other related areas of law*

### Strategies:

- Continue to provide accurate and helpful case data and information
- Foster dialogue between the bench, bar, court stakeholders, and staff and offer training on best practices and procedures
- Identify and communicate issues on which data and information would be most helpful to judges, federal and state lawmakers, and organizations
- Continue to evaluate and expand alternative dispute resolution programs

## GOAL 2.9: RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

*Seek the resources necessary to operate effectively*

### Strategies:

- Implement cost-effective strategies to manage limited budget resources by seeking opportunities when appropriate to engage in national initiatives and shared services with other Court units and the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts
- Identify and offer opportunities for interns and externs to support the mission of the Court
- Pursue supplemental funding when needed to augment the Court's budget and provide additional resources for Court initiatives
- Maintain a culture of responsible stewardship of all Court resources
- Develop procedures and systems for contingencies, including government shutdown, complex case filings, case surges, or budgetary constraints





*“A diverse mix of voices leads to better discussions,  
decisions, and outcomes for everyone.”*

*—Sundar Pichai*

Photo: Ferris Wheel at Irvine Spectrum



# Issue 3 - Judiciary Workforce of the Future

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**Issue Description.** How can we assist judges and staff in responding to a fluctuating caseload? How can the Judiciary and workforce reflect the community we serve? How can we pursue effective communication and collaboration when considering the size of the Court and its geographical complexity? How do we develop new and existing talent to meet the needs of workforce demands, technological advancements, and shifting public expectations?

## GOAL 3.1: STANDARDS OF CONDUCT

*Adhere to codes of professional conduct, ethical practices, and civility standards for judges, Court personnel, the bar, and other professionals*

### Strategies:

- Develop and maintain a workplace that fosters dignity, courtesy, patience, and respect
- Promote performance based on integrity, efficiency, helpfulness, and empathy
- Encourage the reporting of workplace misconduct and reduce barriers to reporting workplace misconduct through the Court's interactive Employment Dispute Resolution process
- Educate and train judges, staff, and volunteers on ethics rules and Codes of Conduct

## GOAL 3.2: RECRUITMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

*Attract and retain a highly-skilled and well-trained workforce*

### Strategies:

- Increase retention of high-performing employees by offering continual, meaningful work tailored toward both the individual's existing and potential skillset
- Evaluate and consider non-monetary employee benefits, such as hybrid and flexible work models, to increase employee interest
- Recruit people who possess the education, skills, experience, commitment, and desire to serve the public
- Introduce law students to bankruptcy practice by providing learning experiences and opportunities





Photo: Pismo Beach

### GOAL 3.3: WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

*Cultivate the continuous learning and development of the existing workforce to meet current needs in fulfilling the mission and future trends impacting succession plans*

#### Strategies:

- Foster a culture of learning where judges, chambers, and Clerk's Office staff strive to keep needed skills current
- Enhance leadership effectiveness through continuous leadership development training and programs
- Promote career mobility through training and development programs offered both internally and externally
- Educate judges and Court personnel on the use of existing and emerging technologies
- Encourage judges to obtain feedback from the bankruptcy bar on judicial performance
- Examine workforce demographics, assess future human capital needs, and maintain a current workforce succession plan



## GOAL 3.4: EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

*Foster a culture that keeps employees committed to the Court's mission and engaged in the work that they perform*

### Strategies:

- Maintain a positive work environment that recognizes achievement, satisfaction, and employee engagement
- Boost work performance and embrace change through continuous reinforcement of mutual trust, communication, active participation, and connection to a shared purpose
- Incorporate employee engagement strategies that recognize and promote the importance of public service and each employee's role in the Judiciary
- Strengthen current employee and judicial involvement with the new-hire onboarding process
- Continue to support the Court's Strategic Planning Council and Centers of Excellence as a conduit to facilitate ongoing feedback and innovation



Photo: Dana Point Harbor

### GOAL 3.5: LINES OF COMMUNICATION

*Facilitate clear communication within the Court*

#### Strategies:

- Promote programs and activities that enhance communication among judges, chambers, and staff
- Implement initiatives to ensure that all divisions communicate and collaborate effectively
- Continue to build an organizational culture that encourages open communication, transparency, civility, and consideration of all perspectives

### GOAL 3.6: INCLUSION, DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND ACCESSIBILITY

*Develop and maintain a judiciary that reflects the community the Court serves*

#### Strategies:

- Foster inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility in the Court's workforce by maximizing efforts to attract and retain employees of differing backgrounds, language capabilities, and experiences
- Encourage law students and attorneys to enter the bankruptcy field to provide a diverse and qualified pool of applicants for future judgeship openings and urge them to apply
- Emphasize inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility through leadership training and practices
- Institutionalize inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility efforts through recognition, presentations, awareness training, and learning opportunities

### GOAL 3.7: COLLABORATION

*Maximize opportunities to work together to achieve the mission of the Court and enhance the Judiciary*

#### Strategies:

- Pursue opportunities to share services within the Judiciary, including no-cost and cost-reimbursable services
- Encourage collaborative work efforts through the adoption of project management principles, software, team-building exercises, action learning teams, and other efforts
- Volunteer to serve on national, circuit, and other committees and working groups to ensure the Court has a voice on critical initiatives and programs
- Share the innovative uses of technologies that highlight the individual strengths and talents of the Court



## GOAL 3.8: FLEXIBILITY

*Be a learning organization able to respond to changing demands*

### Strategies:

- Prepare employees to perform one another's jobs where feasible and appropriate to ensure efficiency and uninterrupted coverage
- Provide the opportunity, knowledge, tools, and support to share responsibilities and assignments among staff in different divisions
- Enhance technical capabilities so that staff may perform operations and administrative duties from any location
- Conduct ongoing reviews of the Clerk's Office organizational structure to ensure effective management practices



Photo: Big Bear Lake



A photograph of a Joshua tree in a desert landscape. The tree is the central focus, with its characteristic spiky leaves and branching trunk. The background shows a rocky desert hillside under a clear sky. A semi-transparent white box is overlaid on the upper half of the image, containing a quote and the author's name.

*“You can’t go back and change the beginning, but you can start where you are and change the ending.”*

*—C.S. Lewis*

Photo: Joshua Tree National Park



# Issue 4 - A Flexible and Responsive Infrastructure

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**Issue Description.** How can the Court continue to implement emerging technology to achieve administrative efficiencies and improve public access? How can the Court continue to ensure continuity and remain safe and functional to accommodate future needs?

## GOAL 4.1: TECHNOLOGY ASSESSMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

*Develop, apply, and manage the best technology to sustain and improve efficiencies and the effectiveness of Court operations*

### Strategies:

- Maintain an IT project review process to determine feasibility and prioritization
- Review the IT Strategic Plan to ensure alignment with the vision, goals, and initiatives of the Court and compliance with the Guide to Judiciary Policy
- Enhance and support the IT infrastructure to provide a consistent, reliable, accessible, and secure technology experience
- Institute IT project management and software development methodologies
- Assess needs and implement improvements in case management systems
- Participate in national committees and programs to further the development and advancement of Court technology and implementation of best practices
- Evaluate new and existing national applications on a frequent basis
- Implement solutions that enable better analysis of data, automate repetitive tasks, and provide predictive analytics

## GOAL 4.2: COURTROOM TECHNOLOGY

*Develop a district-wide plan for courtrooms to support trends and advancements in technology*

### Strategies:

- Examine courtroom technology guidelines and requirements and implement changes as needed
- Upgrade courtrooms to maximize the use of modern courtroom technology for appearance capabilities
- Implement procedures for the electronic submission of exhibits for evidentiary hearings
- Keep current on emerging technologies used by Courts and public and private sector organizations
- Analyze the technologies and associated costs necessary to implement virtual or immersive courtroom experiences
- Ensure Court recording systems are current and optimized for audio quality



Photo: Hollywood Boulevard

## GOAL 4.3: INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY SECURITY

*Ensure the security of all the Court's information technology*

### Strategies:

- Implement Judiciary IT Security Scorecard requirements
- Participate in IT Security Assessments and programs offered by the Ninth Circuit and the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts to ensure security
- Leverage available security tools, resource packets, templates, and awareness materials
- Expand security awareness through training and frequent communication
- Establish and maintain redundancies in all critical systems



## GOAL 4.4: MOBILITY

*Create a mobile-friendly Court utilizing a secure infrastructure and systems to meet the increasing demand and evolving need for connectivity*

### Strategies:

- Provide users with the required training and equipment guidelines to successfully work remotely
- Utilize platform-agnostic applications when initiating new IT projects
- Continue to examine opportunities for digital collaboration and improvements in audio and video technology
- Share and promote the use of collaboration tools and unified messaging applications
- Expand the use of electronic payments, where possible, subject to the guidelines set forth by the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts and applicable law

## GOAL 4.5: PAPER REDUCTION

*Undertake actions to establish systems, practices, and procedures that encourage a reduced reliance on paper*

### Strategies:

- Assess existing paper-based procedures to determine what processes may be automated or digitized
- Review and expand the use of digital signatures, where possible, subject to the guidelines set forth by the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts and applicable law
- Encourage the use of existing electronic systems in lieu of paper to save time and space while improving access to information

## GOAL 4.6: STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK

*Improve systems and the use of technology through experiential learning*

### Strategies:

- Involve public stakeholders in the development and upgrades of technological systems and solutions
- Deliver pre-implementation stakeholder testing and training
- Expand attorney representation and participation on IT issues
- Implement pilot projects for new systems and solutions
- Promote communication and facilitate the exchange of ideas through outreach and user satisfaction surveys

## GOAL 4.7: FACILITIES AND SECURITY

*Maintain safe and accessible Court buildings capable of meeting the Court's current and future needs*

### Strategies:

- Identify, monitor, and address building and safety improvements
- Maintain an updated district-wide long-range space plan
- Pursue funding to ensure all courtrooms are ADA-compliant
- Participate in security committees to enhance security and safety
- Design cost-effective office spaces as funding permits to incorporate healthy, “well-building-inspired” principles
- Continue to strengthen the Court’s relationship with the U.S. Marshals Service, the Federal Protective Service, the U.S. General Services Administration, lessors, and other building occupants
- Cultivate close working relationships with all federal Court representatives to ensure the space needs of the Court are addressed

## GOAL 4.8: EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS AND CONTINUITY OF OPERATIONS

*Adopt procedures that protect people, processes, technology, and facilities to ensure safety and continuity of operations in the event of an emergency or disaster*

### Strategies:

- Maintain an up-to-date Continuity of Operations Plan for the Court and Occupant Emergency Plan for all Court facilities
- Communicate and coordinate the Court’s Continuity of Operations Plan and strategies with other Court units and appropriate public safety agencies
- Conduct routine systematic testing and training on security and emergency procedures
- Evaluate the Court’s security and emergency procedures
- Prepare a report to assess decisions made during an emergency and consider possible alternatives for future reference



## JUDGES OF THE COURT

By Seniority (Top to Bottom)

Honorable Theodor C. Albert  
Chief Bankruptcy Judge

Honorable Barry Russell

Honorable Scott C. Clarkson

Honorable Mark D. Houle

Honorable Vincent P. Zurzolo

Honorable Wayne Johnson

Honorable Scott H. Yun

Honorable Sheri Bluebond

Honorable Sandra R. Klein

Honorable Martin R. Barash

Honorable Victoria S. Kaufman

Honorable Julia W. Brand

Honorable Magdalena Reyes Bordeaux

Honorable Deborah J. Saltzman

Honorable Neil W. Bason

Honorable Ronald A. Clifford III

## RECALLED JUDGES

Alphabetically (Top to Bottom)

Honorable Geraldine Mund

Honorable Erithe A. Smith

Honorable Robert N. Kwan

Honorable Maureen A. Tighe

# CLERK OF COURT

Executive Officer/Clerk of Court  
Kathleen J. Campbell

Chief Deputy of Operations  
Benjamin Varela

Chief Deputy of Administration  
John C. Hermann

## LOCATIONS OF THE COURT



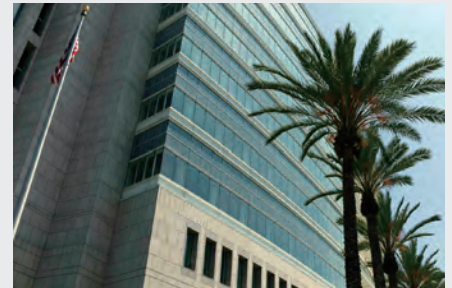
### Los Angeles Division

Edward R. Roybal Federal Building  
and United States Courthouse  
255 East Temple Street  
Los Angeles, CA 90012



### Riverside Division

3420 Twelfth Street  
Riverside, CA 92501



### Santa Ana Division

Ronald Reagan Federal Building and  
United States Courthouse  
411 West Fourth Street  
Santa Ana, CA 92701



### San Fernando Valley Division

21041 Burbank Boulevard  
Woodland Hills, CA 91367



### Northern Division

1415 State Street  
Santa Barbara, CA 93101



# Acknowledgments

The Strategic Plan of the United States Bankruptcy Court for the Central District of California was crafted by a Strategic Plan Committee appointed by the chief bankruptcy judge and composed of executive management, staff, and judges representing the core of the Court's judicial committees. The group reached out to the public, bar associations, law professors, court staff and other public interest group partners for their ideas and comments. Through this process, the Strategic Plan Committee identified fundamental long-term issues facing the Court and formulated goals and strategies to address these issues. Implementation of the plan will be the responsibility of the Court's judicial committees with direction from the Court's Executive Committee and assistance from the Clerk of Court and staff.

## **Strategic Plan Committee**

**Julia W. Brand**, Chair, Bankruptcy Judge

**Martin R. Barash**, Bankruptcy Judge

**Ronald A. Clifford III**, Bankruptcy Judge

**Mark D. Houle**, Bankruptcy Judge

**Kathleen J. Campbell**, Executive Officer/Clerk of Court

**Benjamin Varela**, Chief Deputy of Operations

**John C. Hermann**, Chief Deputy of Administration

**Beryl Dixon**, Director of Human Resources and Court Services

**Blake Francois**, Manager, Planning & Research

**Estella Chavarin**, Senior Court Analyst

The United States Bankruptcy Court for the Central District of California would like to thank the judicial officers, staff, attorneys, and members of the public for their contributions to the development of this strategic plan.