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**CUSTOMER SERVICE AND COURT CONSOLIDATION:
ARE CONSOLIDATED COURTS BETTER ABLE
TO SERVE THEIR CUSTOMERS?**

A focus on customer service is an important strategy of the judicial systems goal of improving the public's trust and confidence in their courts. With the continuing trend of court consolidation to improve efficiency, questions arise as to the compatibility of these two directions--a customer service focus for the courts and a focus on greater efficiencies gained through consolidating courts. For example, do consolidated courts provide improved responsiveness and service to their customers? Is local community needs being adequately addressed in the consolidated court? Can courts answer these questions by surveying their users, and is there a survey methodology which can be replicated and used by others?

This research project and report centers on an assessment of how court administrators, court staff, court users and municipalities view the ability of courts to address customer needs. In jurisdictions with consolidated courts, the research checks perceptions both before and after court consolidation to evaluate benefits to the court? customers. The research also establishes a benchmark of customer service satisfaction in one court, which may be used as a prototype for other courts desiring to solicit internal and external customer input on services.

This study reviews relevant literature on the topics of court reform and consolidation, trends external to courts, and how these trends are affecting the traditional court reform strategies. This report specifically explores the recent trends emphasizing customer service,

increased accountability and smaller, more personalized service in both the private and public sectors. Information is also presented regarding court reform in Oregon, and how this research may influence future reform efforts.

The research was conducted through a series of surveys. Telephone surveys were made of court and municipal officials in five jurisdictions that recently consolidated their courts in California and Michigan. To assess user and staff perceptions of customer service, written surveys were mailed to 2,000 defendants and provided to the 20 staff members of the Eugene Municipal Court. The results of the telephone surveys were analyzed to compare the responses of court administrators to municipal officers regarding the outcomes of court consolidation, specifically in relation to customer service, and to compare the responses from California to those from Michigan. The written surveys were analyzed to compare responses of court staff to court users regarding levels of customer satisfaction. In addition, responses of court users were further analyzed to compare responses of the defendants based on their case type.

The research showed that consolidated courts generally address local community concerns. Many of the consolidated courts surveyed were torn between streamlining operations within their new structure, thereby creating efficiencies, and improving services to customers. The courts with clear direction from their chief justice and state administrative offices were more likely to measure customer satisfaction and implement service improvements. While every court surveyed considered their customers to be satisfied, only half actually solicited feedback from their customers. The research recommends that all courts develop and implement a regular customer feedback program.

This [research paper](#) is available in its entirety in portable document format. To access, you must first obtain and install the Adobe Acrobat Reader.



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