

Katherine B. Miller
Supervisor—Domestic Relations Unit
Twenty-Second Judicial Circuit
920 N. Vandeventer
St. Louis, MO 63108

**EVALUATION OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF LOCAL COURT
RULES
AND THE MEDIATION PROGRAM IN THE TWENTY-SECOND
JUDICIAL CIRCUIT OF MISSOURI**

Limited resources and increased demand on the court system have created the necessity for periodic evaluation of current programs and procedures. This process dictates the demand to discard those programs and procedures, which are not efficiently serving their purpose, and to provide sufficient funding for those that promote satisfaction and case settlement.¹ As the St. Louis City Family Court began to research what type of changes could be made it was found that courts are not alone in this endeavor. The National Center for State Courts, The National Center for Juvenile and Family Court Judges, State Justice Institute, and others are interested in how to make the business of running a court profitable. Profitable not in the monetary sense (although that is important) but in the human sense. After all, courts are people. This study will first examine the importance of local rules, their historical purpose, and their purpose in current court practice today.² Secondly, this paper will look at one court specifically and how local rule

expansion has driven change.

There were many questions explored in this study. The research provided information about how stakeholders (attorneys and clients) perceive the Court's performance.^[1] More specifically, are stakeholders satisfied with the court-connected mediation services they have received? Have mandatory programs (i.e. mandatory mediation and parent education) provided a means to educate and empower families?^[2]

A survey instrument was utilized to question stakeholders about pre and post local rules, mandatory mediation, and enforcement of visitation programs.^[3] The rule changes were made to improve expedition, timeliness, and access to justice and to eliminate lost or drifting cases.^[4] Research of this nature will benefit this circuit and others who may be exploring similar questions by providing information about different aspects of court performance.

The measurable objectives of this research project that were used to assess the stakeholder's perceptions are: results of satisfaction surveys, statewide Missouri statistical information, qualitative data collected from the stakeholders, and the use of relevant studies to compare and contrast the results. The surveys inquired whether the current services are providing the delivery that the expanded rules were designed to do and whether more resources should be allocated. The surveys and the data collected were beneficial. The significance of the research is to determine if resources have been properly allocated and to consider how future data should be collected. Recommendations were derived from the results of the surveys.

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



To obtain a copy of this research paper, please contact:

Knowledge Information Services
National Center for State Courts
300 Newport Avenue
Williamsburg, VA 23185
Phone: (800) 616-6164

¹ Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary defines satisfaction as the fulfillment of a need or want (1044).

² A complete copy of Local Rule 68 is located in appendix A.

[1] Stakeholders are defined as attorneys and clients of the Domestic Relations Divisions of the Twenty-Second Circuit of Missouri – Family Court.

[2] The National Standards for Court-Connected Mediation Programs, 1996, section 3.1 discusses the importance of bringing all stakeholders on board with changes.

⁵ The survey instrument and copies of cover letters are in appendix B.

⁶ Trial Court Performance Standards Implementation Manual, (1997). Trial Court Performance Standards were initiated in 1987 by the National Center for State Courts and the Bureau of Justice Assistance. The Trial Court Performance Standards and Measurement System is “a common language for describing, classifying, and measuring the performance of trial courts.” (iii). Expedition and timeliness are best defined as “A trial court should meet its responsibilities to everyone affected by its actions and activities in a timely and expeditious manner – one that does not cause delay. Unnecessary delay causes injustice and hardship. It is a primary cause of diminished public trust and confidence in the court” (73). Access to justice is defined as “Trial court should be open and accessible. Location, physical structure, procedures, and the responsiveness of personnel affect accessibility”(29). This means that any

barrier to service must be removed be it physical, environment, or personnel. The handbook provides validated surveys and measures that can be utilized to assist courts.