

Teresa Fredrickson
Chief Deputy
St. Louis County District Court
100 N. Fifth Avenue West, Room 133
St. Louis County Courthouse
Duluth, MN 55802-1285

**SERVICE TO THE SELF-REPRESENTED AND COURT STAFF TRAINING:
THE DISCONNECT**

The court performance measures established in the Trial Court Performance Standards are widely used for self-assessment and self-improvement of courts. The five performance standards include access to justice, expedition and timeliness, equality, fairness, and integrity, independence and accountability, and public trust and confidence. Judges, court administrators, and court staff all play important roles in assuring the standards are met, and the public is well served by the third independent branch of government.

Courts have been entrusted with the responsibility of expeditiously and fairly serving all Americans with a forum for legal dispute resolution. Not only have courtroom experiences shaped public opinions of the courts, but experiences with court staff have also had an affect on public perceptions. The importance of every court employee's role cannot be underestimated. It is imperative for court leaders to remember that their most important assets are judicial branch employees, and that adequate training has shown to be key in attracting and retaining top-notch people.

Nationwide, self-representation in family matters has markedly increased. This area of expertise places challenging demands on court employees who are entrusted and required to provide services to the public in these types of court cases. Special attention should be placed on

the training needs of judicial branch employees to assure they are well equipped to provide required services.

Based upon information provided by Minnesota court staff, this researcher concludes there is little existing standardized or formal training to prepare staff to assist the unrepresented in family court matters. From small court jurisdictions to metro jurisdictions, training opportunities for judicial branch employees are lacking. This pattern suggests a challenge for court leaders.

The presence of effective court staff training would benefit our organizations in many ways. Research indicates that effective workplace training initiatives result in higher productivity, greater job satisfaction, and improved customer satisfaction. Other benefits include organizational cost savings and increased levels of staff innovation. It has been shown that strong training initiatives play a significant role in attracting and retaining qualified employees.

A main policy implication from the research is that the court leaders should agree on a comprehensive plan to improve training delivery for court staff. The plan should center on how to efficiently, effectively, and consistently assure that all judicial branch employees are adequately prepared to serve the public. A detailed curriculum with standardized training modules based on staff training, education, and professional development needs should be created. The plan should define the resources needed to effectuate the program and consider pooling of existing resources and procurement of additional funding, if necessary, to accomplish the plan's goals. The program should result in better-prepared judicial branch employees that will improve trust and confidence in the courts as well as provide improved access to the courts for the public.

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 borrow 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

Visit the Institute for Court Management Web site at:
www.ncsconline.org/d_icm/icmindex.html