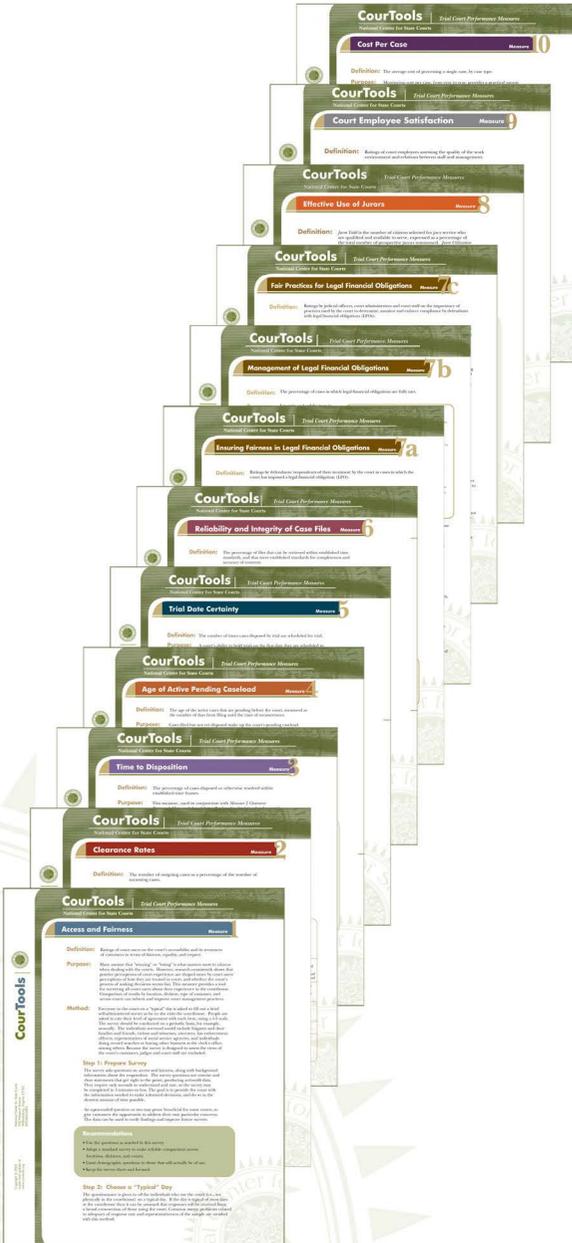


# Giving Courts the Tools to Measure Success



# CourTools

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Courts have long sought a set of balanced and realistic performance measures that are practical to implement and use. The ten **CourTools** performance measures were designed by the National Center for State Courts to answer that call.

Measuring court performance can be a challenge. Understanding the steps involved in performance measurement can make the task easier and more likely to succeed. **CourTools** supports efforts toward improved court performance by helping:

- Clarify performance goals
- Develop a measurement plan
- Document success

Effective measurement is key to managing court resources efficiently, letting the public know what your court has achieved, and helping to identify the benefits of improved court performance.

The NCSC developed **CourTools** by integrating the major performance areas defined by the Trial Court Performance

Standards with relevant concepts from other successful public- and private-sector performance measurement systems. This balanced set of court performance measures provides the judiciary with the tools to demonstrate effective stewardship of public resources. Being responsive and accountable is critical to maintaining the independence courts need to deliver fair and equal justice to the public.

Each of the ten **CourTools** measures follows a similar sequence, with steps supporting one another. These steps include a clear definition and statement of purpose, a measurement plan with instruments and data collection methods, and strategies for reporting results.

Published in a visual format, **CourTools** uses illustrations, examples, and jargon-free language to make the measures clear and easy to understand.

### Access and Fairness

### Measure

1

**definition:** Ratings of court users on the court's accessibility and its treatment of customers in terms of fairness, equality, and respect.

**purpose:** Many assume "winning" or "losing" is what matters most to citizens when dealing with the courts. However, research consistently shows that positive perceptions of court experience are shaped more by court users' perceptions of how they are treated in court, and whether the court's process of making decisions seems fair. This measure provides a tool for surveying all court users about their experience in the courthouse. Comparison of results by location, division, type of customer, and across courts can inform court management practices.

### Clearance Rates

### Measure

2

**definition:** The number of outgoing cases as a percentage of the number of incoming cases.

**purpose:** Clearance rate measures whether the court is keeping up with its incoming caseload. If cases are not disposed in a timely manner, a backlog of cases awaiting disposition will grow. This measure is a single number that can be compared within the court for any and all case types, on a monthly or yearly basis, or between one court and another. Knowledge of clearance rates by case type can help a court pinpoint emerging problems and indicate where improvements can be made.

### Time to Disposition

### Measure

3

**definition:** The percentage of cases disposed or otherwise resolved within established time frames.

**purpose:** This measure, used in conjunction with *Measure 2 Clearance Rates* and *Measure 4 Age of Active Pending Caseload*, is a fundamental management tool that assesses the length of time it takes a court to process cases. It compares a court's performance with local, state, or national guidelines for timely case processing.

### Age of Active Pending Caseload

### Measure

4

**definition:** The age of the active cases pending before the court, measured as the number of days from filing until the time of measurement.

**purpose:** Having a complete and accurate inventory of active pending cases and tracking their progress is important because this pool of cases potentially requires court action. Examining the age of pending cases makes clear, for example, the cases drawing near or about to surpass the court's case processing time standards. This information helps focus attention on what is required to resolve cases within reasonable timeframes.

## Trial Date Certainty

Measure

5

**definition:** The number of times cases disposed by trial are scheduled for trial.

**purpose:** A court's ability to hold trials on the first date they are scheduled to be heard (trial date certainty) is closely associated with timely case disposition. This measure provides a tool to evaluate the effectiveness of calendaring and continuance practices. For this measure, "trials" includes jury trials, bench trials (also known as non-jury or court trials), and adjudicatory hearings in juvenile cases.

## Reliability and Integrity of Case Files

Measure

6

**definition:** The percentage of files that can be retrieved within established time standards and that meet established standards for completeness and accuracy of contents.

**purpose:** A reliable and accurate case file system is fundamental to the effectiveness of day-to-day court operations and fairness of judicial decisions. The maintenance of case records directly affects the timeliness and integrity of case processing. This measure provides information regarding (a) how long it takes to locate a file, (b) whether the file's contents and case summary information match up, and (c) the organization and completeness of the file.

## Ensuring Fairness in Legal Financial Obligations

Measure

7a

**definition:** Ratings by defendants/respondents of their treatment by the court in cases in which the court has imposed a legal financial obligation (LFO).

**purpose:** This measure evaluates the extent to which the court is seen by its customers to demonstrate fairness, respect, equal treatment, and concern in the imposition of legal financial obligations (LFOs).

## Management of Legal Financial Obligations

Measure

7b

**definition:** The percentage of cases in which legal financial obligations are fully met.

**purpose:** Integrity and public trust in the administration of justice depend in part on how and how well court orders are observed and enforced. In the context of legal financial obligations, courts seek to manage compliance to maximize a defendant's ability to successfully meet those obligations. In particular, restitution for crime victims and accountability for enforcement of sanctions imposed on offenders are issues of intense public interest and concern. The focus of this measure is on the extent to which a court successfully manages the enforcement of court orders requiring payment of legal financial obligations.



## Fair Practices for Legal Financial Obligations

Measure

7c

**definition:** Ratings by judicial officers, court administrators, and court staff on the importance of practices used by the court to determine, monitor, and enforce compliance by defendants with legal financial obligations (LFOs).

**purpose:** Using a short survey, this measure provides a method of self-assessment for court personnel to evaluate the utility of their current processes and gauge the importance of incorporating additional recognized good practices to enhance defendant compliance with LFOs.

## Effective Use of Jurors

Measure

8

**definition:** Juror Yield is the number of citizens selected for jury duty who are qualified and report to serve, expressed as a percentage of the total number of prospective jurors available. Juror Utilization is the rate at which prospective jurors are used at least once in trial or voir dire.

**purpose:** The percentage of citizens available to serve relates to the integrity of source lists, the effectiveness of jury management practices, the willingness of citizens to serve, the efficacy of excuse and postponement policies, and the number of exemptions allowed. The objective of this measure is to minimize the number of unused prospective jurors—the number of citizens who are summoned, qualified, report for jury service, and who are not needed.

## Court Employee Satisfaction

Measure

9

**definition:** Ratings of court employees assessing the quality of the work environment and relations between staff and management.

**purpose:** Committed and loyal employees have a direct impact on a court's performance. This measure is a powerful tool for surveying employee opinion on whether staff have the materials, motivation, direction, sense of mission, and commitment to do quality work. Knowing how employees perceive the workplace is essential to facilitate organizational development and change, assess teamwork and management style, enhance job satisfaction, and thus improve service to the public.

## Cost Per Case

Measure

10

**definition:** The average cost of processing a single case, by case type.

**purpose:** Monitoring cost per case, from year to year, provides a practical means to evaluate existing case processing practices and to improve court operations. Cost per case forges a direct connection between how much is spent and what is accomplished. This measure can be used to assess return on investment in new technologies, reengineering of business practices, staff training, or the adoption of "best practices." It also helps determine where court operations may be slack, including inefficient procedures or underutilized staff.

# CourTools



Contact the National Center's Court Services Division  
to learn more about implementing **CourTools** in your court.

Call us toll-free at:

**800.466.3063**

Download a free copy of **CourTools** at:

**[www.courttools.org](http://www.courttools.org)**



**[www.ncsc.org](http://www.ncsc.org)**

## **Court Consulting Services**

707 Seventeenth Street, Suite 2900  
Denver, CO 80202-3429  
800.466.3063

## **Headquarters**

300 Newport Avenue  
Williamsburg, VA 23185-4147  
800.616.6109