

# Court of Queen's Bench of Alberta

---

STRATEGIC PLAN  
2022 - 2027



Court of Queen's  
Bench of Alberta

## Our Vision

A leader in innovative, responsive and accessible justice.

## Our Mission

To provide an impartial forum for the just and proportional resolution of legal disputes, to preserve the Rule of Law and to protect the rights and dignity of all.

# Remarks from the Chief Justice and Associate Chief Justices

On behalf of the Court's Strategic Planning Committee, we are pleased to present the Court of Queen's Bench of Alberta Strategic Plan 2022-27. The aim of the Strategic Plan is to prioritize and guide our Court's work over the coming 5 years.

## COVID-19 Pandemic & Environmental Influences

Our Court has been significantly affected by the global COVID-19 pandemic. As the pandemic progressed, the Court quickly responded and evolved – from paper to email filing, from in-person to virtual/remote hearings, and from local courthouses to home offices. Digital transformation became an urgent imperative. The Court has been transformed in ways embraced by many but not endorsed by others.

Over the next 5 years, the Court will continue to be affected by the pandemic and other significant factors such as economic, technological, socio cultural, legal and environmental changes. Further adaptation will be required. Continued critical examination of what we do and how we do it will be important to our continued fulfillment of our mandate and goals. Change is likely to be the only constant.

## History of the Strategic Planning Process

The Court's past strategic planning processes relied on internal surveys of members of the Court and Judicial Staff. In 2020-21, in times unlike any seen in our lifetimes, the Court sought input to the strategic planning process through the use of internal Focus Groups – small group facilitated discussions with Justices, Masters and Judicial Staff. Discussions (both formal/organized and informal/impromptu) were held with key stakeholders, including members of the Alberta Bar and Queen's Bench Administration.

We have learned of the vital importance of communicating meaningfully, openly, and personally with our Justices, Masters, staff and stakeholders. It is our hope that as we implement our 2022-27 Strategic Plan, we will continue to enhance our internal and external engagement. Internally, we intend to remain connected with each other as we emerge and recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, making our way forward in a changed world, with a renewed commitment to our collective values.

We thank all participants in the Court's strategic planning; a process that was undertaken during a tumultuous time. We hope that you see your views and suggestions reflected in this 2022-27 Strategic Plan.

## About the Court

The Court of Queen's Bench is constituted by the Court of Queen's Bench Act (Alberta), which provides for a Chief Justice, two Associate Chief Justices and puisne Justices. The Act also provides for the appointment of Masters in Chambers (judicial officers with the authority to hear and determine certain applications), and other officers and employees the Court requires in its service to Albertans.

The Chief Justice and Attorney General acknowledge their respective responsibility for the administration of justice in Alberta in accordance with the Court's Memorandum of Understanding with the Attorney General of Alberta, effective January 30, 2017.

The Chief Justice and Attorney General are committed to developing and maintaining an innovative, responsive and accessible justice system in Alberta that delivers timely and impartial justice. They recognize that administration of the Court should be pursued collaboratively to ensure that resources are used efficiently and effectively. The Chief Justice and Attorney General also recognize that the judiciary is an independent branch of government and that the constitutional principle of judicial independence must be respected to maintain the Rule of Law and to ensure public confidence in the administration of justice.

## Internal Governance

The Judges Act (Canada) provides for the judicial administration and overall governance of superior Courts, including by a Chief Justice. The Court's internal governance structure includes an Executive Board, a Strategic Planning Committee and other substantive and skills-based steering and ad hoc committees. This internal governance structure is intended to:

- lead to consensus, collegial and decentralized decision-making;
- foster change leadership;
- align the Court's strategic planning and policy work;
- delegate authority; and
- optimize efficiencies.

# 2022-2027 Strategic Plan

Through our extensive consultation with Justices, Masters and Judicial Staff, we have come to recognize that the pace of change has been unsettling to many. Concerns have been raised that the dwindling resources being made available to the Courts in the execution of their duties is hampering access to justice, as well as presenting challenges to procedure and solemnity of proceedings, critical to enhancing confidence in the administration of justice and the Rule of Law.

The Court has wrestled with identifying those changes in its processes that will be permanent and those that will not. It is with the benefit of that extensive consultation, and recognizing the challenges presented by abrupt change, that the Court has identified the following five Strategic Priorities:

---

1: Independent Court Administration

---

2: Digitalization of Court Processes

---

3: Enhanced Communications

---

4: Workforce Transformation

---

5: Improved Service Delivery

---

Providing improved service delivery through an Independent Court Administration is foundational to achieving our strategic priorities. Digitalization of Court Processes, Enhanced Communications and Workforce Transformation are all essential to our operations.

# Strategic Priorities

## 1 Independent Court Administration

Implementing an Independent Court Administration (ICA) model in the Court of Queen's Bench is critical to the Court's ability to plan and manage its future and fundamental to the realization of the Court's long-term goals. The authority of the Chief Justice to manage and direct the budget for both Judicial and Court Administration must be recognized and enhanced. The Court is in the best position to deploy its resources in the long-term interests of Albertans effectively and efficiently.

While the ICA Business Plan was presented two and a half years ago to the Attorney General of Alberta, the need for an ICA has been made even more apparent. Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, administration has grappled with resource starvation, staffing shortages and an increased workload caused by the sudden shift to email filing of court documents and move to virtual/remote hearings resulting from courthouse closures and efforts to reduce numbers at the courthouse to protect Albertans and frontline workers.

### **Goal**

- Execute an agreement with the Alberta Government for the Court to acquire all Court administration operations and staff in order to wholly manage the affairs of the Court in a manner that is independent of, but accountable to, the Legislative and Executive branches.

# 2

## Digitalization of Court Processes

With the transition away from paper-based systems, the Court and the Alberta Government are working with stakeholders to modernize Court processes by embracing digitalization and expanding the use of virtual/remote hearings and meetings, where appropriate. Older systems are being enhanced or replaced by better technologies. The Court's processes are being critically examined with a view to promoting consistency Province-wide.

A commitment to technological competence and consistency will lead to greater efficiency and access to justice.

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the pace of this change. Through Justice Digital, progress is now being made on:

- Migration to Microsoft M365 - the migration from Novell to Microsoft 365 is already underway and

scheduled to be fully completed by March 2022.

- Case Management - fully digitalize a case file through the entirety of the justice lifecycle, from initiation to conclusion.
- Courtroom Digital Service - improved desktop tools, reduced manual entry, rapid and streamlined post courtroom processing of court orders.
- Adjournment Digital Service - digital experience in which duty, crown and defense counsel can request initial appearance adjournments.
- Virtual/Remote Courts - effectively managing diverse and large numbers of participants in virtual/remote courtrooms, sharing exhibits and evidence, examining data and network requirements, and electronically capturing the official record.

### Goals

- Modernize Court processes through digitization of Court records.
- Ensure a high and consistent standard of judicial and staff technical competence throughout the Province.
- Promote the use of virtual/remote hearings and meetings in appropriate circumstances.
- Implement an electronic filing and Case Management application solution for all areas of law through the Justice Digital program.

# 3

## Enhanced Communications

One of the key priorities that emerged in this strategic planning cycle is increasing transparency of the Court by enhancing our internal and external information sharing. The Court's Integrated Media Strategy aims (in part) to take control of our Court's story, sharing it with a broad audience on all platforms in a timely and responsive manner. This engagement will enhance our connection with one another and our stakeholders - an important objective as we emerge and recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Goal

- Increase transparency of the Court by enhancing internal and external communications in accordance with the Court's Integrated Media Strategy.

# 4

## Workforce Transformation

The execution of the Court's mandate requires a diverse, knowledgeable and engaged workforce with an enhanced digital and technological skill set. To better serve Albertans, the Court strives to develop a workforce that adapts to and thrives on transformative change.

### Goals

- A technologically skilled workforce, comfortable in an environment of change.
- An inclusive, respectful workforce.



# 5

## Improved Service Delivery

Public confidence in the administration of justice is enhanced when access to it is efficient, timely, fair and effective. Accordingly, the Court must be resourced to enable the development and implementation of consistent, direct and proven processes that promote early resolution, reduced lead times and respect for the Rule of Law.

### Goals

- Direct the efficient flow of cases.
- Develop resources and rationalize scheduling to facilitate timely and meaningful access to justice and effective resolution of cases, while maintaining reasonable workloads.
- Reduce Queen's Bench involvement in reviews of certain types of decisions and expand desk processes where appropriate..
- Execute an agreement with the Alberta Government to obtain long-term funding for support services necessary to implement an Alberta Family Court (AFC) with Federal Judicial appointments.