

AJA Benchmark

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AJA's 2011 midyear meeting will be at the Westin Hilton Head Island in South Carolina, April 14-16.

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President's Message

On January 15, 2011 at the AJA Executive Committee (EC) meeting, eleven members of the EC participated in a full-day strategic-planning session, with Dan Hall, Jesse Rutledge, Linda Caviness, and Shelley Rockwell from the National Center for State Courts (NCSC) as the facilitators. This session built upon the visioning workshop held at the AJA annual conference in 2005. In preparation for this session, both the EC and the AJA membership were sent surveys, which sought to identify the goals and objectives of the AJA; to prioritize identified strategies from the 2005 session; and to determine how membership services may be enhanced. The EC decided to review and modify the plan each year, not unlike many other NCSC-affiliated organizations such as the National Association for Court Management (NACM).



Although the full [report](#) is posted online, I would like to highlight some of the more interesting findings. The goals identified by the EC were fourfold: 1) provide and promote education for the judiciary and the public; 2) improve the effective administration of justice; 3) be a leading Voice of the Judiciary; and 4) enhance participation and services to AJA members to retain and increase membership. The EC also identified the top five trends that may affect the operations of the AJA: 1) economic conditions; 2) judicial independence and accountability; 3) public trust and confidence; 4) the evolving role of the courts; and 5) the ability of the courts to be relevant to a changing population. On the latter two trends, the EC believes that the AJA is uniquely positioned to clarify the role of judges in a rapidly changing society and to provide support and assistance to judges.

The responses (115 total) revealed a number of key findings. The membership was evenly split on the single most important reason for belonging to the AJA. Equal numbers selected the educational programming and *Court Review*, while their counterparts opted for the networking and social opportunities with their peers at meetings. Half of the membership surveyed (57) stated that their membership fee and travel fees to attend AJA conferences were paid by their court. Of those 57 judges, two-thirds of them would NOT continue AJA membership if their court ceased funding it. This was most concerning to the EC and shows that the AJA must be very cognizant of the needs of its members. The last two findings were related to membership-fee

recommendations, hotel costs, and the need for the AJA to seek private sources of funding to keep the organization financially healthy.

The EC also reviewed the actual structure of the organization by comparing it to the structures of other court-related organizations. It was noted that most ECs in judicial associations have responsibilities that span both policy and operations. The EC discussed the roles and responsibilities of the Board of Governors with an eye toward involving the governors in more committee work. And after reviewing the structure of the AJA it was concluded that the AJA is a "loosely coupled" organization as opposed to a traditional "command-and-control" institution. So what does this mean? Organizations that fall within our category have the following characteristics: 1) great autonomy; 2) informal authority; 3) unpredictable linkages and coalitions; 4) FAIRNESS as a priority; and 5) status quo as the preferred state. We are akin to universities and bar associations. And, most important, a strategic plan is essential to this type of organization in order for it to be successful and remain viable.

As a result of gathering and discussing all of this information, and it was plentiful, the EC, with the aid of Dan Hall, Jesse Rutledge, Linda Caviness, and Shelley Rockwell, developed the *AJA Strategic Plan 2011-13*. All of the four goals identified above resulted in a related strategic initiative and action, some of which is already in progress. This newly developed *Strategic Plan* is intended to provide that necessary guidance. We call upon all of you to help implement this plan so that the AJA can thrive and be the voice that it clearly was meant to be.

Mark Your Calendars--Important AJA Events & Deadlines

AJA Awards

AJA strongly encourages its members to consider submitting nominations for one or more of the association's awards. The [nominations form](#) should be submitted no later than **July 1, 2011** and may be used for any of the four awards. Please use a separate form for each nomination.

American Gavel Awards

Please also consider submitting nominations for AJA's new [American Gavel Awards](#), which recognize "Distinguished Reporting About the Judiciary." Note that the submission deadline for these awards is **April 1**.

Hilton Head Midyear Meeting Update

It is not too late to register for the AJA Midyear Meeting, to be held April 14-16, 2011 at the beautiful Westin Hilton Head Resort and Spa. Complete [information](#) is available on the AJA website. Please note that the reservations cut-off date is **March 29**.

Come to San Diego for the 2011 Annual Conference!

Plans are well underway for the AJA 2011 annual conference in San Diego, and the conference registration brochure should be in the mail to all members in May. There will be a number of thought-provoking and timely education sessions that will qualify for continuing education credit and several great social events. Watch your mail for more information!

AJA Officer Nominations

Information about [vacancies](#) in AJA's Executive Committee (officers), Board of Governors, and Court of Appeals is available on the AJA website under "Latest News." There also is a link to a [Declaration of Candidacy](#) form. Please take a look and consider becoming more active in your association.

Registration Open for CTC 2011

The National Center for State Courts has opened registration for the 2011 Court Technology Conference ([CTC 2011](#)) in Long Beach, California, October 4-6. Held every two years, this is the largest national conference devoted to improving court operations and service through technology.

Over 1,500 court professionals are expected to fill the Long Beach Convention Center for CTC 2011 to experience cutting-edge educational sessions and world's largest court-technology-vendor show. All information, including official conference hotels and videos of the CTC 2009, are available on the [CTC 2011](#) Web site.



AJA's 2011 annual conference will be at the Westin Gaslamp in San Diego, California.

AJA Future Conferences

2011 Midyear Meeting: Westin Hilton Head Island, Hilton Head, South Carolina, April 14-16
\$209 single/double

2011 Annual Conference: Westin Gaslamp, San Diego, California, September 11-16
\$199 single/double

2012 Midyear Meeting: Doubletree Hotel, Nashville, Tennessee, May 17-19
\$129 single/double

2012 Annual Conference: Sheraton New Orleans, New Orleans, Louisiana, September 30-October 5
\$169 single/double

2013 Annual Conference: The Fairmont Orchid, Kohala Coast, Hawaii, September 22-27
\$219 single/double

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