

trust in the judicial system was at a very low point. The reasons for this low level of trust were not clearly understood. This conference and others like it held throughout the country have helped to articulate the reasons behind the people's feelings.

Three major themes emerged out of the first national conference:

1. The cost of litigation is just too high.
2. Minorities are disadvantaged or treated unequally in the system.
3. There is a lack of public understanding of the role and function of the courts.

A National Action Plan was developed from these themes. With the National Action Plan in mind, the concept for the Best Practices Institute developed. The purpose of the institute is to recognize and promote "promising" and "best" practices in the field of judicial administration. According to the proposal written by Roger K. Warren, a promising practice would be "those policies, practices, procedures, or processes which have moved beyond a demonstration, experimental, or pilot stage and are established or replicated in additional locations, and appear to offer a substantial likelihood of improving court performance." A best practice would be "well established, or have been replicated in numerous locations and have been demonstrated through research or evaluation to result in improved court performance." The focus would be on practices that address one or more of the major themes from the conference. If we can improve the reality of the themes listed above, we should be able to improve the public's trust in the judicial system.

The Best Practices Institute is still in the development stage. A seven-member advisory board is establishing the exact procedures and policies for identifying and disseminating the promising and best practices. Final recognition of the promising and best practices will be a joint effort of CCJ and COSCA. In addition to representatives from CCJ and COSCA, the National Association for Court Management and the American Judges Association have representatives on the board. Chief Judge Eileen Olds, of the Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court of Chesapeake, Virginia, represents AJA. It will be a challenging task for the board to develop the policies and procedures to identify, recognize, and promote practices that actually improve the judicial system.

After reading the report from the national conference and helping to develop the Best Practices Institute, I can easily answer the "why" question that first entered my mind in the fall of 1999. As a presiding judge, I deal daily with the public and

the administration of justice. I can identify the articulated problems leading to the lack of public trust and confidence in the judicial system in my own courthouse. The cost of litigation is too high, and the length of time it takes to resolve even the simplest of problems is just too long and adds to the overall cost. Issues of access for minorities, those with disabilities, and the poor are present despite my efforts to deal with the matters locally. Having the ability to try a practice or procedure that has been reviewed by a neutral group and found to actually improve the administration of justice will be far superior to the "lets-give-this-a-try" approach currently available at the local level.

In the coming months, you may be asked to provide information on a practice or procedure used in your court that you believe is a promising or best practice. Once the Institute disseminates its list of promising and best practices, it will be up to the local courts to implement the new programs and procedures. If we are to respond to the message given to us through the National Conference on Public Trust and Confidence, we may need to try new things and step out of our comfort zones to improve the overall administration of justice. We owe it to the people we serve to do all that we can to address their concerns. I am looking forward to the answers to just what are best practices and to a time when the public trust and confidence in us are at an appropriate level. ■

## Future Conferences

### 2001 AJA Midyear Meeting

Hot Springs, Arkansas • March 29-31  
The Austin Hotel and Convention Center  
(\$90.00 single or double)

### 2001 AJA Annual Meeting

Reno, Nevada • September 30-October 5  
Silver Legacy Resort  
(\$89.00 single or double)

### 2002 AJA Midyear Meeting

Biloxi, Mississippi  
(Dates and hotel to be determined)

### 2002 Annual Meeting

Maui, Hawaii • September 8-13  
The Westin Maui  
(\$155.00 single or double—golf/mountain view;  
\$169.00 single or double—ocean view)