



Court Network Inc.

ABN 122 324 805

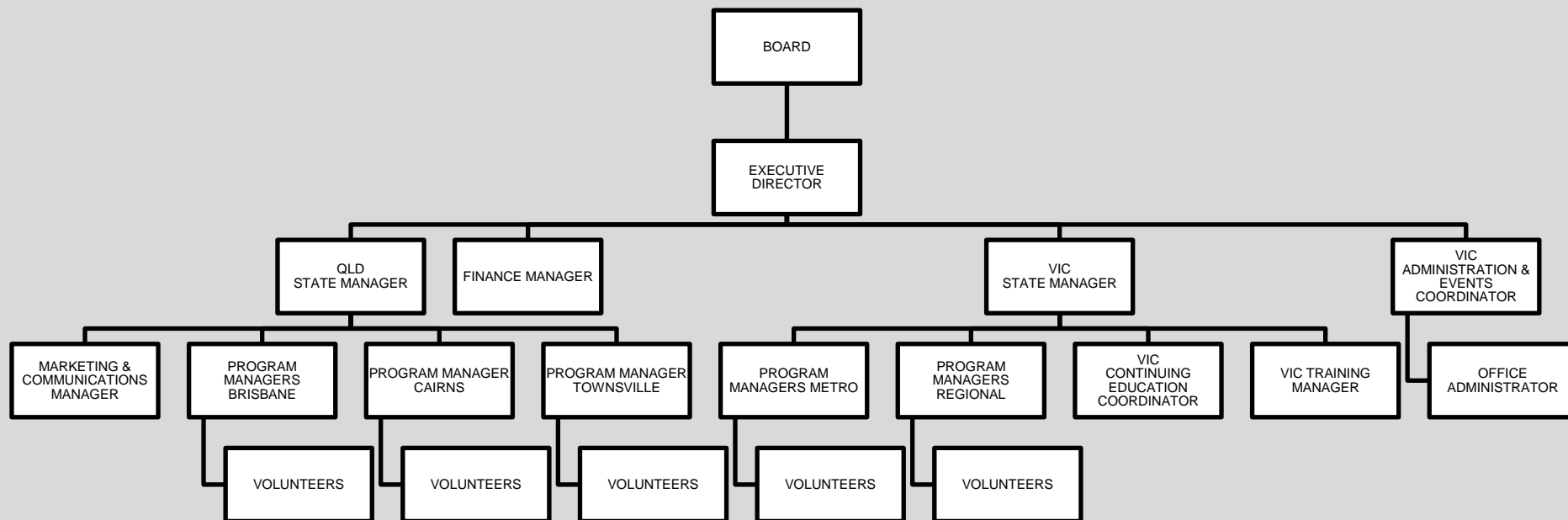
Strategic Plan 2011-2013

Victoria, Queensland and Commonwealth Courts and Tribunals

JUNE 2011



Court Network Organisational Chart



Contents

1. President and Executive Director foreword
2. Our Background
3. Our Strategic Context
4. Our Strategic Priorities
5. How will we deliver this and measure success?
 - Priority 1 – Enhancing the Court User experience
 - Priority 2 – Strengthening and Supporting our Volunteer Network
 - Priority 3 – Extending our Influence Through Partnership
 - Priority 4 – Sustainable Reputation and Excellence

1. President and Executive Director foreword

Every organisation needs a plan - in order to be constructive, to be efficient, and to provide direction and stability. These qualities are a measure of an organisation. The Court Network Strategic Plan 2011 - 2013 derives from extensive consultation in Victoria and Queensland with Networkers and staff, external stakeholders and funding bodies, in turn refined and focused by the Board. It is a considered and thoughtful document. In particular I hope it brings coherence, stability and productivity to our work in the next three years. The Board of Court Network respects the distinction between governance (its proper role) and management (not its role). The work of the whole of Court Network is of significance. I believe we have a great future. I commend the Strategic Plan 2011 - 2013 to you.

The Honourable P. D. Cummins
President.
June 2011

It is with great pleasure that we present this Strategic Plan which guides our future directions for the next three years. These directions were set after vast consultation with our external stakeholders, our funding bodies, our staff, the Board and our Networkers. It is an exciting and ambitious Plan that will enable us to provide an improved service to the court users and focus on providing support to our Networkers who provide the day to day service in our courts. We are confident that working together as a team we will be able to realise our vision “ Volunteers who stand beside, empower and instill confidence in all court users” and achieve our priorities.

We would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the assistance of NOUS whose expertise and professionalism were vital in the construction of the Plan.

Deborah Di Natale
Executive Director Court Network Inc

Pauline McNeill
Acting Executive Director Court Network Inc.
June 2011

2. Our Background

Background

Established in Victoria in 1980, Court Network is an independent, not-for-profit organisation that attends to the needs of people at court by providing support, information and referral services. These services are provided by phone and in person at court. In 2010 Court Network celebrated 30 years of service in Melbourne courts. An extraordinary achievement for an organisation that relies heavily on volunteers. The commitment of the Court Network volunteers is evident. Court Network delivers consistent and specialised Support, Information and Referral to the court and court users by means of over 480 dedicated volunteers.

Achievements in Victoria and Queensland

Victoria

Over the last 30 years, Court Network has successfully expanded its operations such that Court Network volunteers now service all major courts across the State of Victoria, including central and metropolitan Melbourne and a large proportion of regional locations. In 2006, Court Network expanded its operations in Queensland and now operates in Brisbane, Townsville and Cairns. Court Network services Commonwealth Courts in Melbourne and Brisbane.

To deliver services, Court Network relies on the time, energy and good will of approximately 480 volunteers in Victoria. These volunteers enable Court Network to provide assistance to an increasing number of court users which reached almost 149,019 in the 2009-10 financial year. Court Network supports its volunteer base through its Board and a pool of 24 paid staff in Victoria and Queensland who operate the organisation on an annual budget of approximately \$1.5million.

Court Network is proud to say it enjoys continued interest from the community regarding volunteering opportunities. While many other sectors and community services experience lack of interest in volunteering and high attrition rates, Court Network has maintained a consistent solid growth in its volunteer base.

In 2010 Court Network and the Department of Justice took part in a joint project. The Department of Justice was seeking to establish a collaborative venture to assist culturally and linguistically diverse community leaders and representatives to find volunteering opportunities within courts in Victoria. As a result Court Network and the Refugees for Justice Program worked together to bring this project to fruition. As a result representatives from Afghanistan, Iraq, Burma and Sudan have successfully graduated from training in Court Network's intense four month program and begun volunteering in the Victorian courts from November 2010.

Queensland

In March 2010 the go-ahead was provided by the Court Network Board to proceed with the rollout into the Regional Courts (Cairns and Townsville). Over 20 interested persons attended Information and Selection sessions and training was conducted with approximately 15 trainees commencing in each region. In 2010 graduation ceremonies were conducted in Brisbane, Cairns and Townsville to celebrate the completion of the training and probationary period of over 52 volunteers in Cairns, Townsville and in Brisbane.

Court Network is now based in the Brisbane Magistrates, District and Supreme Courts, Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal, Brisbane Commonwealth Law Courts and in the Magistrates, District and Supreme Courts in Cairns and Townsville. Furthermore there is a separate team providing Directional and Justice of the Peace assistance in the Brisbane Supreme & District Court Information Kiosk. There are now 6 paid part-time employees in Queensland and approximately 80 volunteers. Further intakes to occur in 2011 will see those numbers well over 100.



3. Our Strategic Context

The next three years will be both exciting and challenging for Court Network. There is potential for growth of our services in current and new jurisdictions. We need to ensure that growth is consistent with Court Network's philosophy and is sustainable. However there are a number of significant challenges that we will also need to face. This section of the Strategic Plan describes some of the most important external trends and then notes the implications of this analysis for Court Network strategy.

New approaches to Justice

There is a growing philosophical trend within western democratic nations towards problem-oriented or therapeutic approaches to administering justice. This trend stems from the view that the justice system should attempt to address the underlying issues that lead to some types of criminal behavior in order to reduce recidivism. Such issues include severe disadvantage, homelessness, drug addiction and mental health issues.

Coinciding with this trend is a growing awareness of, and concern for, the community's expectations and experience of the justice system. As with all government services, community expectations are continuing to increase. With this comes the view that the justice system should be more accessible, less adversarial where appropriate, more people-oriented and more equitable.

Implications: Court Network has long been a leader within the justice system in terms of appreciating the 'human' experience within the courts and the negative impact of the court environment on members of the community. This significant, long term reform process provides Court Network with the opportunity to leverage its unique understanding of court user needs to advocate for needed improvements within the system. This reform process also provides Court Network with opportunities to be involved in pre and post court services.

Joined-up government and citizen-centric service delivery

Across Australia there is a movement towards greater collaboration between government departments and between these departments and other service providers in order to meet the needs of the community. The intent of this trend is to put the citizen at the heart of the service and organise operations as required to provide a 'seamless' experience. This trend can be seen in the establishment of more multi-jurisdictional courts that provide a more integrated experience for court users. Some of our external stakeholders have expressed a clear strategic intent to work more collaboratively with partner organisations to achieve this end.

Implications: We are keen to partner more proactively with other organisations to deliver better outcomes for Court Network and the justice system more broadly. To be successful in a partnership approach, we will need to focus our efforts on strengthening stronger relationships and raising our profile in both Victoria and Queensland and Federally .

3. Our Strategic Context (cont)

Funding environment following natural disasters

The aftermath of the global financial crisis and natural disasters is producing a tight budgetary environment across the country. There will continue to be increased competition for funding in the short term, which will impact the courts who typically operate under a very tight budget even in strong economic conditions. The current emphasis on providing support to people before trial in order to keep matters out of the Courts (e.g. to family relationship centres) places even higher restrictions on the funding available for court services. This tight budgetary environment is expected to see increased pressure being placed on organisations such as Court Network to demonstrate the value generated from services provided.

Implications: In order to secure the funding we need for the future we will need to improve how we assess our performance and demonstrate return on investment.

The Koori and Murri Courts

The Koori and Murri Courts are a response to overrepresentation of aboriginal people within all levels of the criminal justice system.

Koori Court

The Koori Court is a division of the County Court of Victoria and the Magistrates' Court of Victoria and the Victorian Children's Court that sentences Indigenous offenders. All offences that can be heard in the Magistrates' Court and Children's Court with the exception of family violence and sexual offences can be heard in the Koori Court.

The Koori Court process aims to reduce perceptions of cultural alienation, ensure sentencing orders are appropriate to the cultural needs of Koori offenders and assist them to address issues relating to their offending behaviour.

The general objectives of the Koori Court are to:

- improve offenders' understanding of the court process:
- encourage offenders to take responsibility for their actions and recognise the consequences of their behaviour.
- develop a court system that is culturally appropriate and responsive to the needs and aspirations of Indigenous people:
- facilitate greater positive participation by the Aboriginal community in the sentencing process.
- explore sentencing alternatives prior to imprisonment.

3. Our Strategic Context (cont)

Murri Court

The Murri Court is a Queensland Magistrates' Court which deals with sentencing youth and adult Indigenous offenders.

The Murri Court takes into account cultural issues by providing a forum where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders have input into the sentencing process.

A key objective of the Murri Court is to reduce the over-representation of Indigenous offenders in Queensland prisons and juvenile detention centres by strengthening the partnership between the Magistrates' Court and Indigenous communities in order to deal with Indigenous issues appropriately.

The Murri Court has been set up to give the magistrate involved more culturally appropriate sentencing options to address this issue. Elders will sit with the magistrate and help determine the most appropriate sentencing options, penalties and interventions on a case by case basis.

Cultural inclusion in the judicial process ensures all Queenslanders are represented equally in the courtroom.

New migrant communities

High immigration rates are leading to increases in the number of court users from Culturally And Linguistically Diverse communities (CALD) . The Victoria in the Future 2008 project by the Department of Planning and Community Development estimates that 1.4 million new overseas migrants will enter Victoria between 2008 and 2036. This represents an annual increase of approximately 80,000 which is just short of the population of Ballarat or Toowoomba. The Queensland Premier has also noted that Queensland's population of 4 million could double in less than 50 years through overseas and interstate migration.

While the arrival of new migrant communities is not a new phenomenon in Australia, the country of origin of these communities has changed. At present, there are growing numbers of new migrants from countries including Afghanistan, Sri Lanka and the Horn of Africa. Individuals from these communities often have poor English language skills and little understanding of the Australian judicial system. The challenges that this creates for Court Network volunteers are compounded by the shortage of interpreters which tends to increase levels of agitation and confusion amongst court users from some CALD communities.

Implications: In order to effectively support members of aboriginal and CALD communities .We will increase our focus on providing cultural awareness training and take action to bring greater cultural diversity to our overall volunteer base.

3. Our Strategic Context (cont)

Court users with more complex needs

Other complex needs are found amongst an increasing number of court users with personal issues including mental health issues, drug & alcohol misuse and cognitive impairments. These persons often have limited personal support and may present with high levels of anxiety and/or conflict. Court Network volunteers may require more time and additional skills to work effectively with these persons.

Implications: In order to effectively service court users with more complex needs we will increase our focus on providing training and bring greater diversity to our overall volunteer base



4. Our Strategic Priorities

Vision: *To provide our community with:*

Volunteers who stand beside, empower and instill confidence in all court users

Priorities: *How will Court Network realise its vision?*

<p>1. Enhancing the court user experience</p>	<p>Our services will be tailored to the individual needs of court users and will align with new approaches to Justice</p>
<p>2. Strengthening and supporting our volunteer network</p>	<p>Our volunteers will be provided with the training, support and information they need to deliver the highest quality service</p>
<p>3. Extending our influence through partnership</p>	<p>We will work in partnership with the Courts, the government and community groups to improve the experience of attending court</p>
<p>4. Sustainable reputation and excellence</p>	<p>Through strong leadership, operational improvements and greater demonstration of the value of our work Will enhance our reputation and position ourselves for future growth.</p>

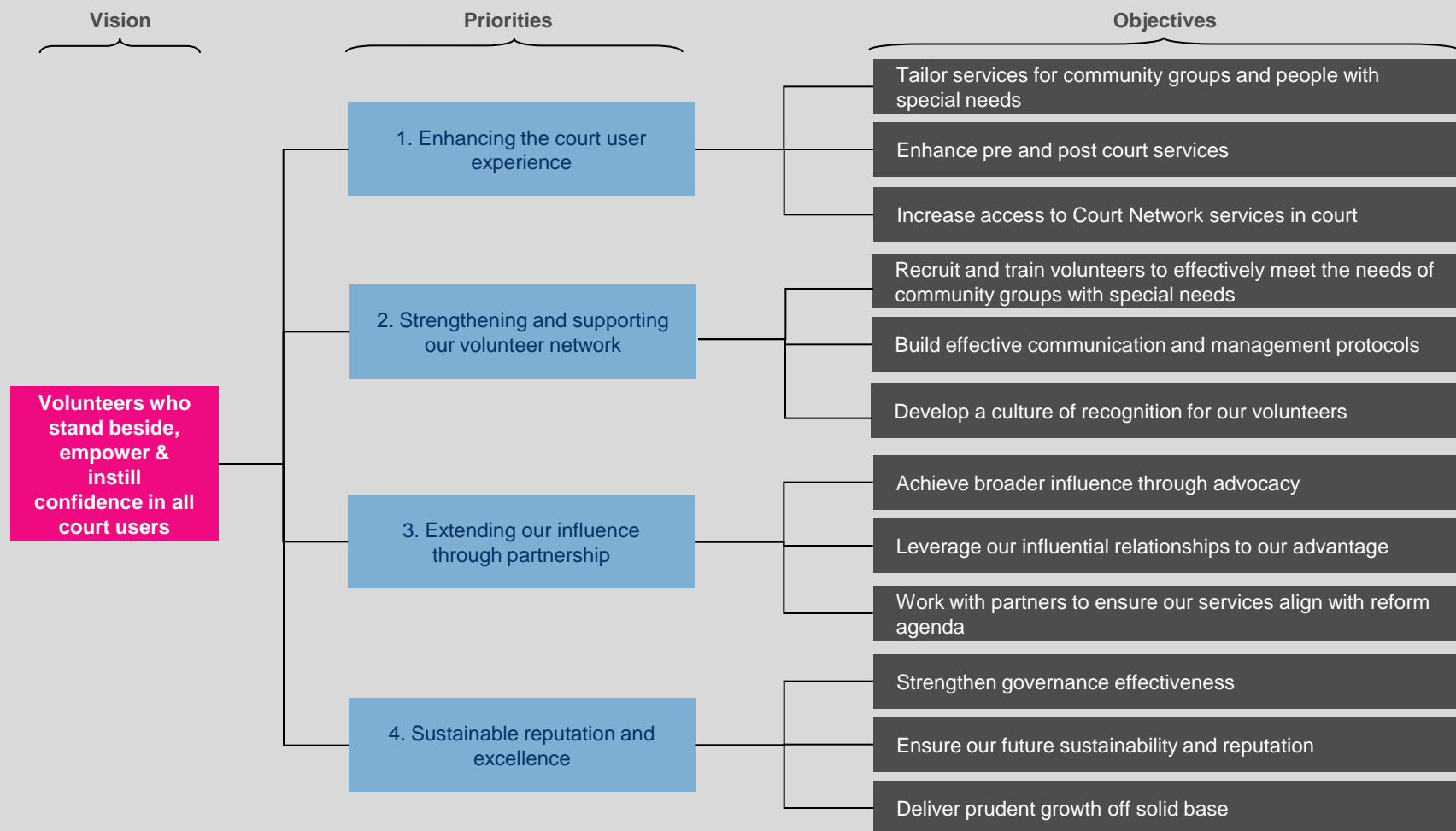
Mission: *What is Court Network's role?*

To provide support, information and referral to persons attending court and to advocate for the needs of all court users.

Values: *What do we believe in and what guides our behaviour*

- **Impartiality:** We serve *all* court users without bias, prejudice or judgment
- **Empathy:** We seek to understand the needs and concerns of court users by standing beside them and experiencing the court from their perspective.
- **Compassion:** Attuned to the needs of each court user, we tailor our services to empower and support each individual.
- **Accessibility:** Our support is available as and when needed. We reach out to those who want help whilst maintaining respect for individual privacy
- **Pride:** We take great pride in the service we provide and strive for excellence in all that we do.

4. How will we deliver this and measure success?



5. Priority 1: Enhancing the Court User Experience

Objectives	How will we meet the objective?	What will success look like?
1. Tailor services for community groups and people with special needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consult and engage with indigenous community leaders and organisations to better understand how the judicial system impacts on the lives of indigenous Australians • Introduce pre-court briefings to educate CALD community groups and community leaders about the Australian justice system and the court experience • Provide Court Network literature / website information in different languages • Increase links with CALD community groups and mental health support services so they can inform Court Network of the unique needs of these groups • Provide appropriate training to enable Networkers to better understand the special needs of court users with mental health or disability issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Networkers will be able to support court users from indigenous communities in a culturally sensitive and effective manner • Court users from CALD communities will report high satisfaction with Court Network's in court services. They will also be more likely to arrive with greater understanding of the Australian justice system and what to expect in court
2. Enhance pre and post court services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investigate and develop opportunities to be involved and support pre court services • Work with other service providers (e.g. witness assist, police etc) to increase community members' awareness of Court Network before they attend court • Use technology to provide better information to court users ahead of their day in court • Provide referrals to a broader base of community providers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Court users will arrive at court with greater awareness of Court Network and the service it offers • Networkers will be able to provide appropriate support to court users presenting with mental health or disability issues
3. Enhance access to Court Network services within court	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase visibility of Court Networkers where required • Establish mechanisms to ensure Court Networkers can be readily and equitably accessed by court users 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Court users will report being able to locate Court Networkers with ease • Court users will leave court with more post court support options

5. Priority 2: Strengthening and Supporting Our Volunteer Networkers

Objectives	How will we meet the objective?	What will success look like?
1. Recruit and train volunteers to effectively service community groups and people with special needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide targeted cultural awareness training for volunteers including content on how to work with interpreters • Recruit volunteers to reflect the diversity amongst court users • Recruit volunteers to increase needed capability and expertise in key areas (e.g. understanding mental health issues, drug addiction etc) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Court Network volunteers will have the capability and resources they need to confidently support court users with special needs • Court Network will have a sustainable and engaged volunteer and staff base measured by high satisfaction scores and retention rates
2. Build effective communication and management protocols	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarify and strengthen program manager and volunteer relationships to enhance accountability and provision of support • Ensure visitation rosters that ensure regular meetings between Court Network staff and volunteers • Improve Networker feedback mechanisms to address specific concerns and aid professional development • Utilise new technologies to more effectively communicate, engage and interact with volunteers (e.g. skype, internet, websites, blogs) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Court Network will continue to exceed volunteer recruitment and retention benchmark rates
3. Develop a culture of recognition for our volunteers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop communication so that Court Network staff, managers and Board members have greater awareness of the day to day achievements of volunteers • Establish initiatives for formal recognition and public acknowledgement of volunteer contributions to Court Network 	

5. Priority 3: Extending Our Influence Through Partnership

Objectives	How will we meet the objective?	What will success look like?
1. Achieve broader influence through advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish Memoranda of Understanding with administrative and judicial court leaders in all jurisdictions. • Communicating the knowledge derived from Court Networkers to relevant bodies. • Work with legal aid and private legal networks to assist in addressing issues of unrepresented litigants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Court Network will be involved in key decision making processes and will participate debate on critical issues • Judiciary and court staff will hold Court Network in high regard and report high satisfaction with services offered
2. Leverage our influential relationships to our advantage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raise awareness and understanding of Court Network amongst the judiciary and legal profession. • Establish strong relationships between Court Networkers and the court administrators/staff at both the Executive and local levels • Establish relationship with the police and provide education on Court Network services • Explore and develop additional influential relationships (other funders, other government departments, community service organisations) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The police and other key external stakeholders will have greater awareness and understanding of Court Network • Court Network's services will maintain relevance as the justice system evolves over the next 3 years.
3. Work with partners to ensure our services align with reform agenda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain awareness of current and expected reforms with the Victorian, Queensland and Federal justice systems • Explore opportunities to evolve or extend services to align with justice system reform agendas (e.g. problem solving approaches and alternative dispute resolution options) 	

5. Priority 4: Sustainable Reputation and Excellence

Objectives	How will we meet the objective?	What will success look like?
1. Strengthen governance effectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue with initiatives to improve risk management • Introduce annual board effectiveness assessment and development planning process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board effectiveness will be enhanced as measured by annual assessment process • Court Network will continue to maintain compliance with funding agreements
2. Ensure our future sustainability and reputation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secure corporate and philanthropic funding for key projects. • Undertake annual evaluations of performance against key performance indicators to demonstrate return on investment • Improve capability in developing business cases to secure funding • Explore joint funding opportunities with community service organisations and community groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Court Network will have strong internal financial performance and controls (e.g. liquidity) • Turnover of court network staff will be reduced • Court Network's services will successfully expand into new locations
3. Deliver prudent growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build capacity and extend services in Victoria (regional) and Queensland (State) and Commonwealth in a sustainable manner. • Develop a business case to expand nationally into new jurisdictions. • Grow additional state networks consistent with agreed risk/investment policy 	

