



RECRUITING FOR POSITIONS IN THE ILLINOIS JUDICIAL BRANCH

**A RECRUITMENT TOOLKIT TO ASSIST
WITH THE HIRING JOURNEY**

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Forward

Welcome to the Illinois Judicial Branch's (Branch) new employee recruitment Toolkit! This Toolkit is intended to assist the hiring managers of the Branch in finding, interviewing, and hiring the best candidates for their open positions.

Whether you are a Judge, Probation Manager, Trial Court Administrator, or elected Circuit Clerk, the importance of hiring great employees cannot be overstated. This is especially true for the multitude of positions within the Branch. Newly hired Branch employees must be willing to fulfill the unique challenges of their new position in a way that furthers the [Branch's mission¹](#), which is "to protect the rights and liberties of all by providing equal access to justice, resolving disputes, and upholding the rule of law pursuant to the powers and duties entrusted to us by the Illinois Constitution." In hiring these new employees, managers must embody the core values of the Judicial Branch:

The **core values** of the Judicial Branch are:

Fairness – impartial in our actions, decisions, and treatment of all.

Accountability – responsible and answerable for our conduct and performance, and transparent in the use of public resources.

Integrity – honest, trustworthy, and committed to the highest ethical and professional standards.

Respect – treat all with dignity, courtesy, and understanding.

This Toolkit is structured around the five major steps of the recruiting process: (1) marketing the position, (2) creating a job posting, (3) advertising the position, (4) interviewing candidates, and (5) extending the job offer. The tools provided within each section are intended to structure and guide you through the recruiting process.

The Toolkit also emphasizes the need to embrace new hiring techniques and themes. Gone are the days of placing job advertisements in newspapers or solely on your organization's website. Instead, hiring managers must use a multitude of resources to make their position known to the widest pool of potential applicants. Additionally, over-emphasizing the need for specific education or experience requirements often unnecessarily limits your applicant pool. In place of looking for candidates that exactly match a job description, hiring managers should embrace diversity. Interviews should consist of skills-based questions asked by a panel of current employees. The job offer should be welcoming and convey all the information needed for the applicant to decide whether to join your team. And, this entire process should occur in a relatively short period of time — around one month.

While recruiting is an ever-evolving process, we hope that this Toolkit will help you recruit the best possible new employees.

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Recruiting for Illinois Judicial Branch Positions

The people we serve across our state expect professionalism and individual accountability of judicial officers and court personnel. To achieve this strategic goal, the Branch must recruit and retain a diverse and highly qualified workforce.

Whether private sector companies or public sector government offices, employees are any organization's most valuable resource. To compete in today's hiring market, Illinois Judicial Branch employers need to reach a broader pool of qualified candidates to fill open positions. This toolkit is designed to assist all Branch employers, which includes all the departments that fall under the Illinois Supreme Court, those working for the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts (AOIC), the Clerk, the Marshal, etc. But looking at the Illinois Judicial Branch more broadly, Judicial Branch employers also include the Appellate Courts, the Circuit Courts, Trial Court Administrators, the independently elected Circuit Clerks, County Probation Directors, the Office of Statewide Pretrial Services, and others. The Illinois Judicial Branch includes many different employers with a wide variety of positions and employees at geographic locations across the state.

Even before the Covid-19 pandemic, public sector employers were struggling to staff open positions as baby boomers began retiring in large numbers. Since the end of the pandemic, many people realized they preferred a work-from-home lifestyle and never returned to an office environment. The resulting tighter job market is making it even more difficult to attract applicants to government positions as many potential applicants are more interested in higher-paying private sector positions, which potentially offer more work from home opportunities.

Research indicates employers can attract new applicants by changing the way open positions are presented to the public and the way recruitment outreach is conducted.² Branch hiring managers, and other public sector employers, need to reconsider and modernize their recruitment processes. This includes streamlining the recruitment process and improving the candidate experience with an online application process with virtual screening interviews.

Marketing

The three biggest public sector job motivators (across age groups) are (1) job security, (2) the opportunity to do meaningful work, and (3) attractive benefits packages.³ While salary is often an important factor in where people decide to work, Millennial, Gen-Z, and younger generations tend to be driven by purpose. They want to make a positive impact on their community and the world they live in. To attract these individuals to open positions, Branch employers need to emphasize the good work of the courts when creating a job posting and throughout the recruitment process.

When hiring for positions in the court system these top three public sector job motivators should be highlighted during all phases of the hiring process, job postings, job descriptions, and interviews. As the number of applications submitted per job opening has decreased significantly in recent years, the Branch needs to take a more proactive approach and do a better job of selling a career with the court system after an application has been received.

Marketing Examples

The National Center for State Courts (NCSC) provides a resource page which links to state court employment websites. [State court employment websites | NCSC](#) There are few instances where state courts are going beyond simply stating the positions they have available, and truly marketing the courts as a place that applicants who otherwise might know little about the court system would want to work. Here are a few examples where state courts are marketing their positions, organization, and culture:

Superior Court in Maricopa County

The Superior Court in Maricopa County, one of the largest, most innovative, and progressive trial courts in the nation, seeks innovative individuals to join our team who will embrace our vision of excellence and the principles inherent in the Rule of Law... every person, every day, every time. We fulfill these principles through a culture that values fairness, respect, integrity, innovation, and safety.

Nevada Supreme Court

Welcome to our Career Page, your gateway to exciting job opportunities within the Nevada Supreme Court. The Nevada Supreme Court offers a range of positions spanning the Supreme Court itself, the Court of Appeals, and vital supporting departments like the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) and the Clerk of the Court.

Vermont Judiciary

Thank you for considering a career with the Vermont Judiciary. The Judiciary is committed to maintaining a positive work environment that ensures all employees are treated with dignity, respect, and courtesy. The State of Vermont celebrates diversity and is committed to providing an environment of mutual respect and meaningful inclusion that represents a variety of backgrounds, perspectives, and skills in all state government positions.

The NCSC also produced a “Courts Rock!” video which presents firsthand accounts from court employees about why they enjoy working for the courts. Considering creating a similar marketing video for your individual agency or division that would present personal stories of why employment with the court provides a unique opportunity to make a difference in the lives of others is a powerful recruitment tool.

Updating the Illinois Judicial Branch “Brand”

Many times, the public sector is losing quality applicants to more sophisticated, interesting, and higher paying private businesses. To combat this talent loss, Branch employers should consider ways to make their organization appear like a well-branded private company. This branding should highlight all the reasons potential applicants should want to work in the court system. This could also include updating the Court’s hiring website to give it a more modern look and user experience, with branding that can be carried throughout recruitment materials.

Online Job Posting

Court managers need to use a variety of online job posting websites to efficiently reach candidates across multiple platforms. Develop a “Careers” page on your website to provide potential applicants researching your company with the information they need. Online information should include the court’s “branding,” highlighting job security, meaningful work, and attractive benefits packages as reasons to apply for open positions and selling the courts as a great place to work. Potential posting sites include:

- Court’s website
- Circuit Clerk’s website
- County’s website
- Job Boards
- IL Supreme Court’s website – [Employment Opportunities page](#)
- [Indeed](#) – A non-specialized, generic job website with a monthly visitor count of 250 million. Indeed offers free or sponsored posts. Only candidates who meet your must-have job requirements are counted as payable clicks.
- [LinkedIn](#) – Leverage the presence of 800 million professionals spread across 200 countries to find the right candidate for your needs. Allows both free and paid promotion postings. When you opt for promoting your job listings, you get three times more qualified applicants because of broader reach and priority display in job searches.
- [National Center for State Courts \(NCSC\).job board](#)
- [Court Opportunity Recruitment for All \(C.O.R.A.\)](#) – C.O.R.A. is a free online common application portal that allows all state courts to post internship, externship, and judicial clerkship opportunities in one place. See Appendix for more information.

Increase Reach with Social Media

Around 7 in 10 Americans regularly use social media to connect,⁴ find and share information, and for entertainment. The average American spends about 2 hours and 7 minutes on social media each day. With the prevalence of social media, Branch employers must use social media channels effectively to promote

openings and better reach a larger, more diverse pool of candidates. Most social media channels will also allow you to promote posts, which with a relatively small budget can be used to put the listing in front of as many ideal candidates as possible. Sites include:

- LinkedIn
 - Showcase the Branch's culture, values and job opportunities
 - Share job postings, but also updates about the Branch's achievements and employee experiences
- Facebook
 - Share job postings, behind-the-scenes content, and community engagement initiatives to showcase the Branch's mission and values
- Twitter / X
 - Disseminate information and engage with a wider audience
 - Share job postings, application deadlines, and highlight impact of the Branch's meaningful work
- YouTube
 - Create video content that provides insight into working for the Branch, showing the different types of careers available working for the courts
 - NCSC "Courts Rock!" style video for IL Judicial Branch
 - [McHenry County Department of Health video](#) illustrating the wide variety of careers within their department, also showcasing the diversity of their staff

Think Outside the Box When Recruiting

Be proactive in the schools – Being active in the local schools available in your area (at all levels) can increase awareness of the jobs available in the court system, while also creating a pipeline of new applicants. Do not always wait for the brightest talent to find the courts, take initiative and reach out to local schools, community colleges, law schools, community groups, and career fairs to promote the idea of working in the court system. High school and college internship/externship programs can be a great way to promote working in the court system. See sample Student Observer Confidentiality Agreement in Appendix.

Do not overlook internal candidates – While this may not work for all positions, it can be a good idea to look at existing employees and "promote from within." Creating a "promote from within" culture also improves employee retention.⁵ Some of the advantages of internal recruitment are lower costs, faster onboarding, and higher employee retention. Some drawbacks of internal recruitment can be limited talent pool, lack of diversity, and risk of constantly promoting people from the same team that have similar ideas as their predecessors.

Ask for referrals from staff – Current employees are a great source for hiring new employees. A good way to source high quality and trustworthy candidates is to ask existing employees for referrals. An employee referral program often accelerates the hiring process and increases the chances of finding candidates who fit your culture. Studies also show that referred job candidates are of higher quality than applicants from the general public and more likely to stay at the job longer and perform better.⁶

Another potential source for referrals can be former employees. Retired employees or former staff that left on good terms can also be a good tool for identifying potential candidates.

Compensation

A higher salary is the top reason applicants pursue a new job.⁷ Even with a great benefit package and job stability, salaries need to be comparable to the biggest local competitors. All employers, including the public sector, need to regularly review salary and benefits to ensure compensation packages remain competitive. For example, Circuit Clerks should regularly reach out through the *Illinois Association of Court Clerks*, or to Circuit Clerks in their regional zone, to compare starting wages for entry level positions. The same can be done for probation officers, court reporters, interpreters, and other comparable positions located in every county.

Review what similar positions in the same building are paying (i.e., clerical positions in different offices of the same courthouse) to avoid losing applicants to offices within your own building. As courts are also competing with municipal, state, or federal agencies in the same geographic area, be aware of what these employers are paying for comparable jobs.

The need for a competitive salary is true whether hiring in a union or non-union environment. Court managers who are working to hire under a union contract need to be vigilant during contract negotiations to ensure that the salary being agreed upon is a realistic number that will attract applicants to open positions.

Recruiting

Today's job candidates have high expectations and a lot of options. 60% of job candidates abandon their online applications because the process took too long or was too complex.⁸ To attract the right people for your job, court managers need to eliminate lengthy and complex application procedures which can be a deterrent to applicants.

Average public sector hiring processes can take three months or longer, more than three times the average in the private sector, which averages around 36 days.⁹ This significant difference in time-to-hire may mean the public sector is losing the best candidates to private sector jobs. Reimagine your hiring process to reduce it from three months to one month to avoid losing interested, qualified candidates. If your hiring process is too complicated and cumbersome, you risk losing good candidates who have neither the time nor patience to wait through an extended process.

Begin by reviewing your current recruiting policies and procedures. Eliminate any that are antiquated and obsolete. Go through the application steps yourself and record each step. This exercise will help give you a clear understanding of your as-is process and allow you to better understand the process from the candidate's perspective. Once you have your current process documented, you can identify opportunities to streamline the application.

The basic steps of an effective recruitment process are:

1. **Planning** – Determine what your needs are, develop a job description, determine if the role is permanent or temporary, full-time or part-time, and what salary and benefits for the role will be.
2. **Strategy Development** – Outline how you plan to find candidates to fill the position, determine where you will post/advertise the opening, whether you will exclusively source from local candidates or widen your search based on the position.
3. **Search** – Actively seek candidates, typically using a combination of internal and external sources for attracting candidates.
4. **Screening** – Narrow the pool of candidates and selecting the candidates who will progress to interviews. Review resumes and cover letters and separate unqualified candidates from those who align with your needs. Once you have narrowed your candidates, contact them by email or telephone. Conduct a 15–20 minute phone screening to verify that the candidate is still interested in the position, and clarify whether they are a good fit for the position. If they pass this screening, schedule time for an interview.
5. **Interviews and Selection** – Before making an offer, run any necessary background checks, verify employment details, and contact references. Verifying information is important, as it confirms that your chosen candidate communicates honestly and aligns with your policies and expectations.
6. **Job Offer** – A job offer is an invitation of employment. You can make both informal and formal job offers. An offer letter is a formal document confirming details like the position title, employment status, duties, work schedule and compensation, many times given after a verbal job offer. According to the Society for Human Resource Management every job offer letter should contain the following key terms.¹⁰ Use this list for discussion with counsel or HR to develop a template agreement that fits your organization.
 - a. **Position/Title**
 - b. **Name/Position of Supervisor**
 - c. **Full-Time/Part-Time Schedule**
 - d. **Exempt/Nonexempt Classification** – It is important to properly classify your employees as exempt or nonexempt from federal and state overtime requirements to avoid penalties or claims for unpaid wages. Consult an attorney for advice about how state law will classify your employees, and how you might reshape the job requirements if you wish to reclassify. Offer letters to nonexempt employees should state they are not eligible for overtime pay. Offer letters to nonexempt employees should state they must record their hours worked and they will be paid overtime (as pre-approved by their supervisor) and describe available meal and rest periods.
 - e. **Duties**
 - f. **Base Salary**
 - g. **Benefits**
 - h. **Policies** –State that employment will be subject to the company's policies, procedures, and handbook (if applicable) as adopted, revised or deleted from time to time.

- i. **At-Will Employment or Union Contract** – If the employment is at-will (typical except for union positions), the offer letter should explain that either the employee or the employer can terminate the relationship at any time, with or without cause or advance notice. Avoid language implying any fixed period of employment, or even “soft statements” about “looking forward to a long relationship.” If the employment is for a union position, the offer letter should explain employment will be pursuant to the current union contract.
- j. **Contingencies** – State that the offer is contingent upon a background check clearance, reference check, and satisfactory proof of the employee’s right to work in the U.S. as required by law.

Job Descriptions

A job description is a useful, plain-language tool that describes the tasks, duties, functions and responsibilities of a position. Candidates are generally more likely to apply for positions that have realistic requirements which can be justified by the salary offered. Create clear and concise job descriptions, outlining the necessary skills and qualifications. Many educational and experience requirements are arbitrary. To be fairer and open the candidate pool to a wide range of people, job requirements should be critically examined and modified accordingly. The following topics should be included in a good job description:

- **Job title** – The job title is one of the most important parts of the job description, as it lets employees/applicants know what their title would be in a role. It should also suggest some of the position’s basic responsibilities. It should be clear and concise.
- **Classification** – Exempt or nonexempt under the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA). See FLSA guidelines in Appendix.
- **Salary Grade/Range**
- **Reports to** – Title of the position this job reports to.
- **Summary/objective** – Summary and overall objectives of the job.
- **Essential functions** – Make a list of job duties and responsibilities of the position. Most job descriptions list job responsibilities in a bullet list, as it can help keep them organized and easy to read. Be sure to start each bullet point with an action verb, as this can help the candidate gauge exactly what they can expect to do in the position. Use clear language and avoid unnecessary words or jargon.
- **Knowledge, skills and abilities** – Include a list of hard or soft skills that you are looking for in this position.
 - Hard skills also called technical skills, are job-specific and relevant to each position and seniority level. For example, an accountant needs to know how to reconcile bank statements, while that knowledge (or hard skill) is not necessary for an IT developer. At the same time bank statement reconciliation is an important skill for all accountants no matter what level of experience, but preparing a budget is a hard skill not usually required of a junior accountant.
 - Soft skills are general characteristics, relevant to personality traits. Some soft skills you would like to see in all employees, regardless of their position (i.e. great team player, can communicate well with others) while other may be

more specific to the position applied for (i.e. leadership abilities).

- **Supervisory responsibilities** – Direct reports, if any, and the level of supervision.
- **Work environment** – the work environment, temperature, noise level, inside or outside, or other factors that will affect the person's working conditions while performing the job.
- **Physical demands** – The physical demands of the job, including bending, sitting, lifting and driving.
- **Position type and expected hours of work** – Full time or part time, typical work hours and shifts, days of week, and whether overtime is expected.
- **Travel** – Percentage of travel time expected for the position, where the travel occurs, such as locally or in specific areas, and whether the travel is overnight.
- **Required Education and experience** – If the job has minimum education or experience requirements, it is important to include these in the job description.
- **Preferred education and experience** – Preferred education and experience based on requirements that are job-related and consistent with business necessity.
- **Additional eligibility qualifications** – Additional requirements such as certifications, industry-specific experience.
- **Other duties** – HR professionals recommend a disclaimer that the job description is not designed to cover or contain a comprehensive listing of activities, duties, or responsibilities that are required of the employee. Duties, responsibilities, and activities may change, or new ones may be assigned at any time with or without notice.

Job Posting

The job posting is a key marketing tool for recruitment, serving to attract qualified candidates to apply for your position. Evidence shows that minimizing jargon in job postings may widen their appeal.¹¹ It is the first point of attraction for potential candidates and should contain the following components:

- **Job title** – An engaging job title that targets the right candidates for your open position is clear, concise, and reflective of the role's duties and level of seniority.
- **Job description** – Provides an overview of the position, including the purpose and primary functions of the job. A good job description gives candidates a clear understanding of what the role entails and how it fits within the organization. Avoid unnecessary jargon and overly technical terms.
- **Role and responsibilities** – Include specific duties and expectations associated with the position. List these using bullet point or numbered lists for easy readability, prioritizing the list with the most important responsibilities listed first. Be precise and realistic about day-to-day activities. Identify job location and travel requirements explicitly.
- **Required skills and qualifications** – Include necessary education, experience, technical skills (hard skills), and soft skills. It is crucial to distinguish between "must have" qualifications and "nice-to-have" skills to avoid deterring potentially qualified candidates who may not meet an exhaustive list of criteria. When feasible, consider using statements to encourage more applicants to apply, such as:

“We are interested in hiring the best possible candidate for this role. We recognize that experience, knowledge, skills and abilities can be attained in a variety of ways. If you feel you would be a good fit for this position, please don’t hesitate to apply.”

- **Benefits and salary** – Including specifics about compensation and benefits can make the job more appealing, highlighting the benefits of working for the Judicial Branch. Transparency about salary range, health benefits, retirement plans, and other perks can attract high-quality candidates. This is where Branch positions need to emphasize the benefits that come with working for the public sector, and the Branch in particular, including job security, work-life balance, pension plans, career growth opportunities, and other benefits of the position. Consider offering flexible work hours, telecommuting options and family-friendly policies where possible to better attract and retain top talent.
- **Showcase the culture of working for the Branch** – Use this section to differentiate working for the Branch by highlighting the meaningful work of the Branch. Few positions offer the number of opportunities to make a difference in many lives as the positions within the Branch.
- **Include application instructions** – Specify the application process steps, provide contact information for further inquiries and set realistic expectations about the timeline for the recruitment process, being mindful that trying to stick to a one-month target for the entire process will avoid losing interested, qualified candidates.



Interviewing

A successful and effective interview is one in which both the interviewer and the interviewee receive accurate information and can make informed decisions about the applicant's suitability for the job. It is important to conduct consistent interviews and evaluate all candidates using the same criteria. Using a **structured interview with questions focused on job-relevant competencies** is a best practice which can offer numerous benefits, including streamlining the process for making effective hiring decisions and eliminating bias by allowing interviewers to remain objective. Using a diverse panel of three interviewers is recommended.

Preparing for a structured interview

Conducting a structured interview requires a methodical approach to ensure consistency. Following a clear series of steps can help you prepare. These steps can be scaled for large or small hiring operations and used for hiring multiple types of positions.

- Compile a list of hard and soft skills your ideal candidate should possess to help guide your interview questions.
- Once you know the relevant hard and soft skills, write questions that test whether your candidates have these qualities. Behavioral and situational questions may give insight into your candidates' experiences and problem-solving skills.
- Add some job specific questions to your structured interview to determine whether your candidates have the experience and skills required for the specific vacant position.
- Create a candidate rating system to help you score each candidate based on their answer to each question. Totaling the scores can help you find the best candidate for the position. A simple 5-point scale, which awards candidates 1 to 5 points based on the quality of their answers works in most hiring situations. See sample Job Interview Scoring Sheet in Appendix.
- Before your interview distribute your questions and rating system to the panel of interviewers to let them familiarize themselves with the questions and rating system. All members of the interview panel should use the same scoring system.
- It is recommended to select the candidate that scored the highest among most of the panel members, rather than combining total scores among all panel members.

How to conduct a structured interview

- **Greet your candidate** – A greeting helps put the candidates at ease and builds rapport, making them more likely to give genuine responses.
- **Ask each question on your list in the order as written** – Asking each question as written ensures each interview remains standardized.
- **Give your candidate time to answer** – Giving your candidate plenty of time to answer each question ensures they can get the maximum points possible.
- **Score each answer immediately** – Scoring each answer before moving on to the next question will give you the most accurate results, allowing you to grade based on your immediate reaction. See sample Job Interview Scoring Sheet in Appendix.

- **Explain & market the position** – Once all the questions have been answered, tell the applicant more details about the position and allow them to ask questions about the job and organization. Use this as an opportunity to sell working for the court system to each applicant.
- **Close the interview** – Thank the applicant and tell them specifically when they should expect to hear from you regarding the next steps.

Structured Interview Sample Questions

- What are you most proud of in your career?
- What was the most important goal you reached in your career? How did you achieve this?
- Can you tell us about the best manager you have worked for?
- Describe three qualities of a previous manager that you thought were good/bad for your work relationship.
- Tell us about a time you had to delegate. What was the result?
- What has your biggest professional challenge been?
- Can you describe a time you identified a problem in your department and how you resolved it?
- Do you remember a time you made a mistake at work? How did you handle it?
- Can you tell us about a time you did not agree with a coworker? How did you handle the situation?
- What has been your most rewarding experience working as part of a team?
- Can you tell us about a time your department or company was undergoing some changes? How did you adapt to those changes?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of the ____ software you used in your last job?
- Are you comfortable using a telephone with several lines and handling high call volume?
- What steps do you take when approaching a new project?
- How would you handle a customer unhappy with the service they received?
- How would you prioritize multiple assignments from different managers?
- How would you manage an unmotivated employee?
- How would you handle things if you had almost finished a project, but the scope changed?
- How would you respond to criticism from your direct supervisor?
- How would you handle things if you could not complete a project on time because you were awaiting information from coworkers?
- Tell us about a time you faced an ethical dilemma at work. What did you decide and what was the result?
- What steps would you take to make an important decision at work?
- What would you do if you had to work with a difficult manager? Judge? Coworker?
- What type of person do you enjoy working with? What type of person do you not enjoy working with?
- Tell us about a time you struggled with work-life balance. What did you do? Did you manage to solve the problem?
- Tell us about a time you had an idea that improved your workplace in some way. How did you make sure it was implemented?

- What was the last training you attended? How did you use your new knowledge in practice?

Legal Pitfalls to Avoid

Asking insensitive or inappropriate questions during an interview does more than just insult the people you are interviewing. It is possible to break the law simply by asking the wrong interview questions. Various employment laws govern the hiring process. Federal and state laws make it illegal to discriminate in hiring based on a protected class. Specifically, an employer violates the law when it either fails to hire an applicant because of an applicant's protected class, or uses criteria that appear to be neutral, but has an adverse impact on the hiring of applicants in a protected class. Using skills-based questions during an interview is one step that can help you avoid potential discrimination.

Hiring managers might have the best intentions, but here are some examples of what may seem like innocent small talk that **should be avoided** due to their discriminatory nature:

- "Are you married?"
- "Do you have or want children?"
- "What happened to your arm?"
- "What did you do for Christmas?"
- "I went to your high school, what year did you graduate?"
- "How old are you?"
- "That's a unique name, where are you from?"
- "Have you had any other names?" "What is your maiden name?"
- "Do you have any health conditions that would lead to absences from work?"
- "What church do you go to?"
- "What clubs or organizations do you belong to?"
- "Have you ever filed a worker's compensation claim?"
- "What is that accent you have?"

Occasionally, even when not asked, an applicant will offer up information that is not related to the job or is illegal to consider when making a hiring decision. Do not document the information or even comment on it. Redirect the conversation back to the topics related to the candidate's ability to perform the job duties. It is very important to avoid documenting any irrelevant, potentially discriminatory information.

Federal protected class categories:

- Race
- Color
- Religious affiliation
- Sex / Gender
- Sexual Orientation / Gender Identity
- National Origin
- Age (40 and over)
- Disability Status
- Genetic Background
- Pregnancy
- Veteran's Status

Illinois State Laws include federal protected categories PLUS the following:

- Ancestry
- Marital Status
- Unfavorable Military Discharge
- Citizenship / Work Authorization Status
- Order of Protection Status
- Equal Pay Act – PA 101-177 prohibits pre-employment salary inquiries in Illinois
- Arrest Record
- Criminal Convictions. See more details on Criminal Convictions in IL in Appendix.

Flexible Qualifying Criteria

Recognizing the Illinois Judicial Branch's strategic initiatives to recognize and instill the values of diversity, equity, and inclusion, and recruit and retain a diverse and highly qualified workforce, there are things that court managers can do to increase the diversity of their applicant pool. Skills-based hiring has been gaining popularity among employers. In 2023, more than 45% of employers on LinkedIn explicitly used skills data to fill their roles (12% more than the previous year), and about a fifth of job posting in the United States no longer require degrees. Skills-based hiring could present an opportunity for the public sector to address difficulties in attracting new talent.

Degree requirements can prevent workers without college degrees from accessing public sector jobs. Skills-based hiring can open the door for those who are “skilled through alternative routes,” such as community college or prior work experience. Data also suggests that searching for workers with relevant skills can lead to a tenfold increase in eligible candidates, including potentially increasing the number of diverse candidates.

A skills-based job posting should look different from a traditional job posting beyond just replacing unnecessary credential requirements. It involves analyzing the job, breaking it down into desired competencies, and then describing what each competency means for the job. Grouping skill into required (must-have on day 1) and preferred (will provide on-the-job training to develop) can offer candidates the clarity they need to apply for a position confidently.

Increasing and Embracing Diversity

Research suggests that diversity contributes to optimal performance.¹² Diversity encompasses a range of different factors including but not limited to age, gender, gender identity, race, ethnicity, background, and life experience. Differences – perceived or actual – can increase alertness and awareness and generate more creative and responsive problem-solving efforts and deliberative processes. Inclusion, as a value and an ideal, is the objective.

In hiring processes, while we would not make decisions *based on* race, gender, sexuality, or other identity attributes, or sacrifice legitimate demands, we are encouraged to shape our recruitment efforts to attract qualified applicants of diverse

backgrounds and perspectives. Being intentional about providing access to apply for opportunities in the Illinois Judicial Branch not only honors the diversity of the communities we serve but also the objectives and principles of the Illinois Courts as well.

As a blueprint for the recruitment process, reframe diversity goals around inclusion. This can shift the focus from numbers and representation to an approach – and potential hiring outcomes – designed to best reflect the Judicial Branch principles of fairness, value for all relevant facts and circumstances, and securing the trust of a diverse public. An inclusive approach prioritizes recruitment practices designed to cast a broad net while cultivating respect for diversity as a value.

It can be difficult to avoid thinking of diverse candidates as “diversity hires” valued more for their identity than their qualifications and interpersonal skills. In order to avoid these innate biases, we must be cognizant of our shortcomings and hold ourselves accountable to address these automatic and unintentional assumptions. Keep in mind that these biases are not solely related to appearance and view but extend to a multitude of factors.

As an aid, we might think of diversity and inclusion as one of several factors associated with a successful cycle of candidate recruitment, rather than a label attached to individuals. Just as we might consider an applicant’s work experience or academic background a “check” in the “plus” column when assessing qualified candidates, we might also consider that same qualified applicant’s background and cultural perspectives to be a plus as well. While we would not hire primarily to enhance diversity, we might take our diversity values into account as one of several legitimate factors to consider. This can shift the lens towards diversity as a value, rather than the defining factor of the hiring process.

Being intentional in not labeling candidates can also be a vital tool for retaining a diverse team in an inclusive environment. Ultimately, our diversity recruitment efforts should say more about us and our organizational values, in an inclusive way.

Both the careful consideration of qualifying criteria and equivalent competencies and the composition of the team on whom you rely on to assess and advance candidates are important.

When feasible, your recruitment committee should consist of individuals with varying age, gender or gender identity, race or ethnicity, geographic location, opinions, and experiences. This group should be empowered to bring their perspectives and experiences to bear for the challenging task of applicant assessment and elimination, which requires a combination of informed awareness, objectivity, a willingness to guard against unexamined or unconscious assumptions, and regard for the operational needs of the hiring entity.

If current demographic realities in the hiring unit are not conducive to the formation of a diverse recruitment committee, consider appointing at least one member with the ability to serve as an inclusion advocate and ambassador. One need not be a

member of an identity group considered diverse to serve in this role; what's needed is a commitment to encouraging careful, thoughtful, and constructively inclusive approaches to candidate assessment, including the consideration of unique circumstances, equivalent qualifications, and overall potential.

Appointing a recruitment committee member from outside the hiring unit, in an allied role or from a like enterprise, can also support efforts to diversify the candidate assessment process. The Judicial Branch Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer is also an available resource to advise, support, or serve as an *ex officio* member of Judicial Branch search and recruitment committees.

Post notice of the opportunity to apply for your open position with affinity organizations and publications, including affinity-based bar associations, whether the position opening is targeted to lawyer applications. Members of these organizations can be a valuable resource by engaging their networks to circulate news of the opportunity to apply. While qualified applicants generally have access to mass-population platforms, posting in venues devoted to the well-being and success of affinity communities sends a message about your recruitment efforts and intentional commitment to inclusion.

Lastly, when recruiting for positions requiring an associate, bachelor, law degree or licensure, consider reserving G.P.A. requirements for finalists, to enhance a broader and potentially more diverse applicant pool. The law school experience may have been uniquely challenging for some first-generation students or those lacking supportive networks for navigating an educational model heavily steeped in self-directed learning and reflective thought. This is especially true for law school graduates where their grade point average derives from a series of once-a-semester exams. This grading system may not accurately capture the fullness of academic readiness for all applicants across the board. Because G.P.A.s may not be the sole or primary indicator of suitability for the position you're seeking to fill, consider broadening the scope of qualifying criteria for positions targeted to law school students or recent graduates. Balancing the G.P.A. with other metrics such as writing samples or clinical experience may net a broader pool and account for "hidden gems" among applicants.



APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Job Posting Example – National Judicial College

Are You Our Next Administrative Assistant?

- Are you experienced in providing administrative support in a fast-paced environment?
- Do you consider organization and attention to detail your defining attributes?
- Are you resourceful and able to take initiative?

If you answered “yes” to all of the above, then we may have the perfect position for you! Created more than a half-century ago at the recommendation of a U.S. Supreme Court justice, The National Judicial College remains the only educational institution in the United States that teaches courtroom skills to judges of all types from all over the country, Indian Country and abroad. The categories of judges served by this nonprofit and nonpartisan institution, based in Reno, Nevada, since 1964, decide more than 95 percent of the cases in the United States.

The National Judicial College is seeking a diligent Administrative Assistant to maintain general office activities and operations while providing clerical and administrative support to management.

The ideal qualified candidate will have the following skills and experience:

Required

- High School Diploma
- At least two (2) years of related experience in a professional office setting

Preferred

- Bachelor’s degree
- Experience in an education environment

This position is located in Reno, Nevada- deemed The Biggest Little City and listed as a US News Best Place to Live. Find out more about the perks of living and working in Reno: Home - WorkLivePlayRenoTahoe

Relocation assistance may be available.

Please e-mail cover letter and resume to: NJC-HR@judges.org

NJC offers a competitive compensation and benefits package.

We are an Equal Opportunity Employer. All applicants will be considered for employment without regard to actual or perceived race, color, religion, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, national origin, age, disability, medical condition, pregnancy, genetic information, marital status, amnesty, or status as a covered veteran or any other characteristic protected by applicable federal, state or local laws.

Appendix 2: Job Posting Example – Nevada Supreme Court

Welcome to our Career Page, your gateway to exciting job opportunities within the Nevada Supreme Court. The Nevada Supreme Court offers a range of positions spanning the Supreme Court itself, the Court of Appeals, and vital supporting departments like the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) and the Clerk of the Court.

Your journey starts here. If you require accommodations during the application process, or if you have any inquiries about our positions, our Human Resources team is here to assist you. Reach out at 775-684-1744 or via email at hr@nvcourts.nv.gov. Join us in shaping the future of justice in Nevada!

Benefits include:

- **Health Insurance:** medical, dental, life and disability insurance programs for employees and dependents/family are offered.
- **Vacation:** Accrual of three weeks of annual leave each year.*
- **Sick Leave:** Accrual of three weeks of sick leave each year.*
- **Holidays:** 12 paid holidays per year.
- **Retirement:** Participation in the Nevada Public Employee Retirement System (PERS).
- **Deferred Compensation:** The State has a voluntary deferred compensation program.
- **No Nevada state income tax.**
- **Public service loan forgiveness.**
- **Flexibility:** a work-life balance beyond compare!

Appendix 3: C.O.R.A. Court Opportunity Recruitment for All – NCSC Data Sheet



CORA

Court Opportunity Recruitment for All

National Center for State Courts | ncsc.org/CORA

What is CORA?

Court Opportunity Recruitment for All (CORA) is a one-stop recruitment hub for students, law school graduates and judicial chambers for state court law clerkship, internships, and externships. Put another way, CORA is a free online common application portal that allows all state courts to post internship, externship, and judicial clerkship opportunities in one place. CORA allows applicants across the country to review the posted opportunities, add their information, and apply to any opportunity of interest.

Why CORA?

Clerkships, internships, and externships provide invaluable opportunities to hone research and writing skills while being exposed to a wide range of legal issues, and unique insight into the judicial process. CORA makes it easier for interested people to find available clerkships, internships, and externships, and for courts to hire a diverse range of interested students and law school graduates.

OSCAR serves as the gateway for federal court opportunities; but unlike the federal courts, state courts each operate autonomously and on different hiring schedules. As an initiative from the Conference of Chief Justices and the Conference of State Court Administrators (CCJ/COSCA), CORA offers a centralized location to find and apply to judicial clerkships, internships, and externships from across the country.

CORA was also founded by CCJ/COSCA with a clear desire to expand the diversity of the bench and bar. Because clerkships are often a pipeline to top jobs in the legal profession, CORA allows for increased transparency and engages law students and graduates from diverse backgrounds to consider working with judges. CORA is an initiative that is part of CCJ/COSCA Blueprint for Racial Justice, and in addition to the CORA portal, NCSC staff and CCJ/COSCA members are working to encourage students from diverse backgrounds to learn about and apply for judicial clerkships, internships, and externships.



Why Support CORA?

CORA is a one-of-a-kind portal that fills a need identified by potential applicants, state courts, and educators. It is a win-win-win:

- CORA benefits applicants by raising awareness of state court opportunities and reducing the barriers that applicants have historically encountered when searching for and applying to state court clerkships, internships, and externships. Because CORA attracts trial courts, courts of review and state supreme courts from across the country, applicants can connect with multiple opportunities easily and directly.
- CORA benefits courts by enabling them to easily post their opportunities on one online platform. By posting their opportunities they can conduct a national search for candidates, which instantly increases and diversifies their potential pool of applicants.
- CORA allows educators to direct their students to one resource when they express a desire to work in a state court. And educators can do so with the assurance that the opportunities are current and the opportunities relevant to their students' interests.

At a Glance:

- One stop portal for state courts, applicants, and educators to search, apply, and post state court clerkship, externships, and internships.
- A resource intended to create an equitable application process to increase diversity in state courts.
- Increase awareness of state court opportunities while reducing barriers.



Appendix 4: Job Description Example



McHENRY COUNTY JOB DESCRIPTION

JOB TITLE:	COURT/COURTROOM SPECIALIST I	FLSA STATUS:	NON-EXEMPT
DEPARTMENT:	CLERK OF THE CIRCUIT COURT	GRADE:	UNION
REPORTS TO:	CIRCUIT CLERK DIVISION MANAGER		
CREATED:	FEBRUARY, 2010	REVISED:	

JOB SUMMARY:

The Court/Courtroom Specialist I provides clerical, administrative, customer service, data and record control support for various court operations.

ESSENTIAL JOB FUNCTIONS:

- Provide customer assistance to judges, attorneys, litigants, other agencies, and the general public, either in person, by phone or electronically, responding to requests for information about court proceedings, document filing, case scheduling and court fees, using discretion in handling confidential case information, including cases impounded and/or sealed by statute or court order; schedule court dates based on knowledge of court schedules, practices and procedures.
- Receive and process new cases filed with the 22nd Circuit Court; receive and record various legal documents filed in person, by mail or electronically; update newly issued warrants; quash warrants when ordered; issue summons; process files to be transferred to other counties per court order.
- Coordinate cases and supporting documents that have been assigned to a specific courtroom, providing clerical assistance to judge; document the disposition of each case; process documents filed in person or electronically; take notes to update the case information as required.
- Assess fine and/or court fees based on court order, statute, Illinois Supreme Court Rule and County Board Resolution. Receive and process payments. Balance cash drawer at the end of each shift. Research and correct any discrepancy.
- Process court ordered notifications, sending notice to court participants or other parties where required pursuant to court order, court rules or statute. Calculate fees for copies based on statutes; provide document copies to public.
- Assist the public with the process for filing a Petition for Order of Protection, as required by statute. Process Orders of Protection and make necessary notifications to sheriff, schools, etc.

- Prepare, scan, and index manually filed documents into document imaging system.
- Operate office equipment such as fax machines, copiers, phone systems, scanners, and use computers for performing data entry in case management system, spreadsheet, word processing, database management, and other applications.
- Interact with staff, elected officials and the general public in person or by telephone in order to respond to inquiries, receive complaints, and resolve problems, providing a variety of clerical and administrative support functions for the department.
- Performs other related duties as assigned

MATERIAL AND EQUIPMENT USED:

- Personal Computer
- Multi-line Telephone
- General Office Equipment
- Calculator
- Copier
- Scanner

MINIMUM QUALIFICATIONS REQUIRED:

Education and Experience:

- High school diploma or GED; and,
- Two or more years of clerical experience in an office environment.

Licenses and Certifications:

- None.

KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS, AND ABILITIES:

Knowledge of:

- Legal terminology and courtroom procedures.
- Administrative and clerical procedures and systems such as word processing, managing files and records, designing forms, and other office procedures and terminology.
- Knowledge of the structure and content of the English language including the meaning and spelling of words, rules of composition, and grammar.
- Computer applications related to the work.

Skill in:

- Keyboard/typing speed of 35 wpm minimum.
- Communicating effectively, both orally and in writing, with the general public.
- Using tact, discretion, initiative and independent judgment within established guidelines.

- Organizing work, setting priorities, meeting critical deadlines, and following up assignments with a minimum of direction.
- Operating and routine maintenance of general office machines such as copiers, facsimile machines, telephone systems, and two-way radio base stations.
- Preparing moderately complex documents.
- Accurately proofreading copy with accompanying knowledge of grammar, punctuation and spelling.
- Performing basic mathematical computations such as addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division.
- Performing data entry using word processing, spreadsheet or database commands and formats material as required.

Working Conditions:

- Works in a normal office environment where there are little or no physical discomforts associated with changes in weather or discomforts associated with noise, dust, dirt and the like.
- The incumbent's working conditions are typically moderately quiet.
- While performing the essential functions of this job, the incumbent is regularly required to walk, sit, use hands to finger, handle, or feel objects, to reach with hands and arms, and see, talk or hear.
- While performing the essential functions of this job the employee is occasionally required to lift and/or move up to 25 pounds.

Disclaimer:

This class specification should not be interpreted as all inclusive. It is intended to identify the essential functions and requirements of this job. Incumbents may be requested to perform job-related responsibilities and tasks other than those stated in this specification. Any essential function or requirement of this class will be evaluated as necessary should an incumbent/applicant be unable to perform the function or requirement due to a disability as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Reasonable accommodation for the specific disability will be made for the incumbent/applicant when possible. This document describes the position currently available. It is not an employment contract. McHenry County reserves the right to modify job duties or job descriptions at any time.

Appendix 5: Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA)

Wages & Hours

Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA)

- Sets minimum wage (\$7.25). Illinois also has state minimum wage (\$11, 1/1/22 - \$12, 1/1/23 - \$13, 1/1/24 - \$14, 1/1/25 - \$15). 820 ILCS 105/1
- Mandates federal requirements for overtime
- Dictates required recordkeeping (employment and scheduling records)
- FLSA contains no requirements for breaks or meal periods. Illinois law (820 ILCS 140/3) mandates a meal period of 20 minutes for every 7 ½ hour shift beginning no later than 5 hours after the start of the shift.
- 29 U.S.C. § 201 et seq.

FLSA Application

Exempt employees

- Executive; Administrative; Professional
- Not Eligible for Overtime

Non-exempt

- Eligible for time and one-half the regular wage for hours worked over 40 in a week
- There are special rules for police and fire

Appendix 6: Criminal Convictions in Illinois

Protected Class Categories

Criminal Convictions in IL

It is a civil rights violation to discriminate based on an employee's or applicant's criminal conviction record, unless a specific exception exist. 775 ILCS 5/2-103.1

Exceptions include:

1. Another law prohibits the employment of individuals with certain convictions.
2. There is a "substantial relationship" between the previous criminal offense(s) and the job position sought or held.
3. The granting or continuation of the employment would involve an unreasonable risk to property or to the safety or welfare of specific individuals or the general public.

If making an employment decision based upon criminal conviction(s), the employer must consider statutory factors and follow a process, which includes notifying the employee or applicant of the decision.

Factors to Consider

The following factors must be considered by the employer when considering criminal convictions:

- (1) duration of time that has passed since the conviction;
- (2) the number of convictions on the record;
- (3) the nature and severity of the conviction and its relationship to the safety and security of others;
- (4) the facts and circumstances surrounding the conviction;
- (5) the age of the individual at the time of the conviction; and
- (6) any evidence of rehabilitation efforts.

Interactive Assessment

Before making an employment decision, the employer must send a preliminary decision notice to the individual that includes the conviction(s) the employer is considering, a copy of the conviction record/report, an explanation of the employer's reasoning for disqualification, and that the individual has at least five (5) business days in order to provide evidence to refute the accuracy of the conviction, demonstrate any rehabilitation/mitigation, and/or otherwise address the employer's concerns.

If the employer still decides to take adverse action, then the employer must send a Final Decision Notice to the individual, which must include notice of the conviction(s) deemed disqualifying and the employer's reasoning, and identifying any procedures the employer has in place to challenge such adverse action, as well as notice of the individual's right to file a charge of discrimination with the Illinois Department of Human Rights.

Appendix 7: Student Observer Confidentiality Agreement



Welcome to the 17th Judicial Circuit Court

STUDENT OBSERVER CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

The core values of the Illinois Judicial Branch are fairness, accountability, integrity, and respect. Integrity means being honest, trustworthy and committed to the highest ethical and professional standards. Our professional standard of objectivity requires that we as employees of the judicial branch maintain the confidentiality of our public work. As a student observer, you are held to the same standard.

The purpose of this Agreement is to help you understand your responsibility regarding information that you may obtain as part of your learning experience with the Winnebago County 17th Judicial Circuit Court. This agreement relates to what you see and/or hear within the courtrooms/courthouses/office settings.

By signing this Agreement, I understand that:

1. I agree maintain the confidence of the names or other identifiable information about the members of the public doing business at the court or appearing in the courtrooms. Confidence in this context means not sharing the information with any friends, fellow students, teachers, parents, relative, etc.
2. I agree to not record or photograph anything during my observation experience unless specifically authorized to do so, as identified below:
 - Public Hallways – posed photos permitted (confirm no court patrons are in the background); and
 - Courtrooms and Judicial Offices – posed photos as permitted by a judge.

I have read this Agreement, and agree to abide by its terms.

Signature

date

Printed name

Appendix 8: Job Interview Score Sheet Template

Applicant Name _____ Date _____
 Position Applied For _____

Directions: Each member of the interview panel should keep their own score sheet. All applicants will be asked the same questions. Circle a score for each of the questions. Add a total for each column, then a grand total score for the applicant.	Excellent	Good	Fair	Needs Improvement	Poor
Answer to question #1	5	4	3	2	1
Answer to question #2	5	4	3	2	1
Answer to question #3	5	4	3	2	1
Answer to question #4	5	4	3	2	1
Answer to question #5	5	4	3	2	1
Answer to question #6	5	4	3	2	1
Answer to question #7	5	4	3	2	1
Answer to question #8	5	4	3	2	1
Totals for each column:					
GRAND TOTAL SCORE:					

Interview Panel:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Appendix 9: Job Offer Letter Template & Example

You can write a job offer letter by using this template:

[Date]

[Candidate name]

[Candidate address]

Dear [candidate name],

We are excited to offer you the position of [job title] at [Court name]. This is a [full-time/part time] position with a start date of [start date]. This offer is contingent on [any conditions, such as background and drug tests]. In this position, we will expect you to [list of primary duties]. You will report directly to [manager name] at our [Court] location. The starting annual salary for this position is [salary]. Pay periods are [pay schedule] via [pay method, such as direct deposit or mailed check]. Besides this salary, we are offering you [benefits, etc.]. Your employment is [explain employment conditions, including union or non-union]. [Offer further details if needed]. While working at [Court name], we offer you [list [paid time off](#) allowance]. [Explain the terms of the time off]. Please accept this offer by signing and returning this letter by [job offer expiration]. Please reach out to us with questions you may have.

Best,

[Hiring manager name and signature]

[Job title of manager]

[Area for candidate to sign and date]

In order to draft your own job offer letter, you can use this example as a guide:

April 15, 2030
Aaron Ross
4446 Alexander Road
Roanoke, Virginia 24001

Dear Aaron,

We are excited to offer you the position of [Administrative Assistant](#) at [22nd Circuit Court](#). This is a full-time position with a start date of [May 2, 2030](#). This offer is contingent on both background and drug tests. In this position, we will expect you to provide the [22nd Circuit court patrons](#) with services to . You will report directly to Grace Anderson at our [Woodstock, Illinois](#) location. The starting annual salary for this position is [\\$48,000](#). Pay periods are [biweekly](#) and are via direct deposit or mailed check. Besides this salary, we are offering you a [full benefits package, including dental, health and eye insurance](#). Your employment is on an at-will basis. You may end your employment at any time, preferably prior to submitting a two-week notice. [The 22nd Circuit Court](#) also reserves the right to end your employment at any time. While working at the [22nd Circuit Court](#), we offer you 15 days of paid time off, including sick days. You can use these days after giving notice to your manager. We do not currently offer a rollover policy. Please accept this offer by signing and returning this letter by April 20, 2030. We are happy to welcome you to our team! Please reach out to us with questions you may have.

Best,
Blaine Mason
[General manager](#)

Sign_____ Date_____

Appendix 10: References

[17 Recruiting Strategies To Hire Top Talent In 2024 - AIHR](#)

[11 Effective Recruitment Strategies In 2024 – Forbes Advisor](#)

[Recruitment Workgroup - OneDrive \(sharepoint.com\)](#)

[Hiring Top Talent From Generation Z: 14 Essential Recruitment Tips \(forbes.com\)](#)

[A-Time-for-Talent.pdf \(ourpublicservice.org\)](#)

[Court Leader's Advantage Podcast 3/19/2024 Episode: Courts & Talent: Are We Doing Enough? - YouTube](#)