

Federal Judicial Center
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The Federal Judicial Center

Education and Research for The U.S. Federal Courts

History

Congress created the Federal Judicial Center in 1967, a period in U.S. judicial history marked by growing interest in the use of quantitative research and continuing education to improve judicial administration. Representatives of the federal judiciary, including then-Chief Justice Earl Warren, recognized the importance of research, planning, and education for the long-term effectiveness of the courts. Congress then created an organization within the judicial branch with responsibility for these tasks. The Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts had been established in 1939 to oversee the administration of the judicial branch budget, the collection of statistical data, policy innovations, and legislative relations. Rather than assigning responsibility for education to the Administrative Office, Congress created the Center as a distinct judicial agency, thereby separating the research and education functions from policy-making responsibilities and protecting funding of those functions from the demands of everyday court business.

Mission

The Center provides education and training for judges and employees of the federal courts. It also coordinates educational programs for federal public defenders, who represent indigent criminal defendants in federal court. (The U.S. Department of Justice trains federal prosecutors.) The Center's Research Division conducts empirical studies and exploratory research into different aspects of judicial administration, such as case management, alternative dispute resolution, and proposed amendments to the federal rules of procedure. These research activities often inform development of Center educational programming. The Education Division plans and delivers educational programs in consultation with advisory committees of judges and court staff. The Center is also responsible for documenting the history of the federal courts.

In 1992, Congress amended the enabling legislation to authorize the Center to serve as a resource for foreign judiciaries. Its International Office provides information to federal government agencies and other organizations working in the field of international judicial development.

The Center does not train state court judges and personnel or provide services to them.

Structure

The Center operates under the general direction of its board, which is chaired by the Chief Justice of the United States, with seven federal judges elected to four-year terms by the Judicial Conference of the United States. The Director of the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts is an ex officio member of the Center's board. The board establishes policy and consults on

programs and research projects; it is not involved in the Center's day-to-day operations. The board appoints the Center's director and deputy director. The director has often been a federal judge who gives up judicial duties while serving.

The Center has a staff of about 120 that includes attorneys, education specialists, researchers with advanced degrees in law and the social sciences, and professionals with expertise in media, publications, and information services and technology.

Funding

The Center's annual budget in 2024 was approximately \$34 million, used for program costs (participant travel, lodging, meals, etc.), distance-learning technologies, staff salaries, and other operational needs. These funds are allocated directly to the Center by Congress. A separate Federal Judicial Center Foundation created by Congress decides whether to accept private gifts offered to support the Center's work. Foundation funds are a small fraction of the Center's overall spending.

Judicial Education

Federal judges preside over varied caseloads that include both civil and criminal cases, with subjects ranging from civil rights and intellectual property to narcotics offenses and corporate crimes. The Center develops judicial education programs and materials designed to assist judges with managing growing caseloads while keeping abreast of relevant developments in law, science, and technology.

The Education Division provides orientation seminars for newly appointed judges as well as continuing judicial education programs. Programs and written materials emphasize practical skills. Rather than working from a standard law school-type curriculum, the Center regularly revises course offerings based on new developments in the law and court practice. Judicial education attorneys plan and coordinate seminars, often consulting with advisory committees of federal judges, court administrators, and, in some cases, legal practitioners. Presentations are delivered by federal judges with expertise in particular areas, as well as by academics and practitioners and, occasionally, Center staff members. The Center takes great care to ensure that programs are balanced, presenting all legitimate viewpoints relevant to the subject matter covered in its workshops. Most faculty volunteer their services, compensated only by reimbursement of expenses and, in the case of non-judges, small honoraria.

There are no mandatory educational requirements or standards for federal judges, but the majority take advantage of Center offerings. Attendance costs (travel, lodgings, and meals) are paid by the Center.

Orientation programs

Federal judges do not take a special examination or course to gain appointment, and their post-appointment orientation is relatively brief. Before serving, judges have had significant professional experience as attorneys (private or government practice) and, in some cases, as members of state judiciaries or lower federal courts.

The Center sends newly appointed judges a selection of educational publications and invites them to attend two one-week orientation sessions focusing on skills unique to judging: civil and criminal trial practice, case management, opinion writing, judicial ethics, and, for district judges, the criminal sentencing process. The programs also address workplace conduct, physical security, and cybersecurity. Substantive law covered during the orientation process is limited to complex areas of statutory and constitutional law that arise frequently in federal litigation (e.g., employment discrimination and habeas corpus). New judges rely on their independent legal research to master other areas of the law with which they are unfamiliar.

The first phase of the orientation cycle takes place within a few months of the judge's appointment and typically includes eight to twelve new judge participants. The program uses a mentoring model: two experienced judges lead a series of discussion sessions throughout the week on topics including civil case management, evidence rules, jury trial administration, and sentencing. The discussion sessions are informal and unstructured, enabling participants to ask questions that reflect their interests and needs. A visit to a federal prison is also part of orientation for new district judges, providing them an opportunity to view firsthand the conditions that defendants they sentence will confront.

The second phase of the orientation, which takes place at the Center in the Thurgood Marshall Federal Judiciary Building in Washington, D.C., brings together two or three groups from the earlier orientation programs. Over the course of a week, sessions are held on subjects such as civil rights litigation, employment discrimination, case management, relations with the media, and ethics. Orientation programs for appellate judges have a similar structure but different content.

Continuing judicial education

Among the Center's continuing education programs for judges are specialized workshops in such areas as intellectual property, employment law, constitutional history, and law and technology, as well as a skills-based program in mediation. These two- to three-day seminars for district and appellate judges, bankruptcy judges, and magistrate judges are presented at locations around the country, often in cooperation with other institutions such as law schools. An additional series of annual national and regional workshops covers a range of legal topics and judicial skills, including recent decisions by the U.S. Supreme Court, new developments in the law, ethics, use of technology and artificial intelligence, legal history, and law and literature.

The Center also develops programs for chief judges (who have responsibility for administration within their circuits or districts) on leadership and management skills, as well as special workshops on teamwork for chief judges and their chief court administrators.

Educational Materials

In addition to in-person educational workshops and conferences, the Center provides information to judges through publications, videos, podcasts, and web-based materials. The Center develops reference manuals, practical guides, and short monographs on substantive law topics. Materials are often reviewed by judges, advisory groups, or subject-matter experts.

The *Benchbook for U.S. District Court Judges* is a guide to conducting the pretrial and trial phases of litigation, such as criminal arraignments, jury selection, and motion practice. The *Civil Litigation Management Manual* sets out a wide array of case-management techniques, beginning with early case screening and concluding with steps for streamlining trials and final disposition. The *Manual on Recurring Problems in Criminal Trials* outlines the law governing many of the specific issues and procedural matters that arise in criminal trials.

Many of the Center's offerings for judges, including the three examples just cited, are available on its website on the nonpublic federal court intranet, through which court employees can access Center publications, videos, program materials, and other educational materials. Most Center publications and resources are also available to the public on the Center's non-restricted site, www.fjc.gov.

Evaluation of Center educational programs

At the close of each live program (in-person and electronic), the Center gives participants evaluation forms to assess the effectiveness of the program, written materials, and speakers. Participants are asked whether the program is likely to help them perform their jobs and are invited to provide feedback regarding the program's scope and content. The Center uses this information in planning future programs. The Center does not administer examinations to judges or otherwise attempt to monitor their performance as a means of evaluating the effectiveness of its programs.

Participation by judges of other countries

When appropriate, the Center may allow judges of other countries to observe its educational programs, space permitting. Foreign judges are not asked to pay tuition but must finance and arrange for their travel, hotel, and meals. Center programs do not review basic elements of

particular fields of law; they address emerging trends and issues likely to pose problems for U.S. judges. For this reason, they are often of limited utility to foreign observers, other than to serve as an example of educational techniques and program design.

Training for Federal Court Employees

The Center develops programs and materials for court administrators, probation officers, pretrial services officers, and other court staff. In addition to orientation programs for some new court employees, the Center offers programs teaching management techniques and specific job skills. Unlike its programs for judges, most Center programs for court employees are delivered through distance education.

The Center often uses a multimedia approach for staff training, developing digital and web-based programs along with guides and materials. These programs often include follow-ups with instructors. Center education specialists, many of whom have advanced degrees in education or law, develop these programs working closely with advisory committees. Program design follows a curriculum development model stressing needs assessment, collaboration with subject-matter experts, and a pilot phase to test effectiveness. The Center often delivers staff training in collaboration with the Administrative Office. Importantly, several federal courts have developed extensive local training programs, often coordinated by an "in-court training specialist" (usually a staff person responsible for training, among other duties), which the Center supports with train-the-trainer workshops and curricula and training materials such as instructor and participant guides and audiovisual aides.

The Center's digital and web-based programs provide valuable information about strategies for meeting job responsibilities and learning about new developments in court practice. The long-running *Court to Court* series, profiles federal courts around the country, examining "best practices" in a range of administrative issues. Other programs have addressed developments in courtroom technology, professional ethics, and strategies for supervising employees.

The Center's online tutorials on the federal bankruptcy rules, ethics, and the *Code of Conduct* enable court staff to educate themselves in these important areas at their own pace.

Research

The Center conducts empirical and exploratory research into different aspects of judicial practice, court administration, and criminal sentencing. The Research Division, staffed by professionals with inter-disciplinary training in the law and social sciences, undertakes most of its projects at the request of committees of the Judicial Conference of the United States.

Center research studies generate objective information to help the Judicial Conference develop recommendations for the number of new judgeships, measure the impact of innovations in case management, and assess the need for amendments to the rules of procedure. Center studies also help judges identify effective practices in court administration and the conduct of cases. The Center does not advocate a particular course of action or reform initiative. Its research projects have, to give a few examples, examined the uses of courtroom technology to present evidence and its possible effects on the fact-finding process, evaluated digital audio recording technology for generating transcripts of court proceedings, reviewed alternative dispute resolution practices, and studied changes in rules governing class action litigation.

Studying the History of the Federal Courts

Part of the Center's mandate is to conduct research on the history of the judicial branch. This is the job of the Federal Judicial History Office. The office's online reference source for judicial history features a biographical directory of all life-tenured federal judges, legislative histories of all federal courts, quantities of historical documents and notes, and reference guides to judicial history. The office also develops educational materials to encourage the study of the history of the federal judiciary, and it supports historical programs in individual federal courts.

International Programs

The Center's International Office (IO) works with the judiciaries of other nations on a broad range of initiatives. Many of these programs involve collaborations with other judicial institutes that focus on curriculum design, pedagogy, and institutional development. At the request of foreign judiciaries, U.S. government agencies, and other organizations, IO prepares workshops addressing judicial branch education, court administration, judgement writing, judicial ethics, and developing practical publications and online resources. The Visiting Fellows program provides an opportunity for foreign judges, court officials, lawyers, and scholars to conduct research at the Center and examine a topic related to judicial administration, often with the assistance of Center staff. IO hosts visiting delegations for informational briefings about the U.S. judicial system and the work of the Center. IO has developed a microsite exploring comparative judicial practice. [Judiciaries Worldwide](#) provides an overview of how countries around the world structure their court systems.

Travel and other direct costs of foreign judicial education programs, including the Visiting Fellows Program, are funded by outside sources.

To Learn More About the Federal Judicial Center

More detailed information about the Center can be found at www.fjc.gov. The site contains publications, and the results of selected research projects on federal court operations, procedures, and history.

To arrange a visit to the Federal Judicial Center or request information about Federal Judicial Center materials, contact:

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