

ACTIVITY OVERVIEW



Topics to be addressed

- ☆ Role of the judicial branch;
- ☆ Judicial selection processes;
- ☆ Differences between judges and other elected officials; and
- ☆ Current issues impacting fair and impartial courts

Time needed: 30 minutes

Overview: Participants will analyze the characteristics of a fair and impartial judiciary and learn about judicial decision-making as well as judicial selection and retention processes in this presentation. Participants will examine the characteristics, qualities and qualifications of judges as well as current issues impacting the judicial branch.

Group type and size: This presentation is intended for adult civic/nonpartisan groups and may be implemented in a variety of settings including dinner meetings. Note: Slight modifications can be made to utilize this presentation in judicial candidate forums to introduce the public to the processes for judicial selection and to have the audience consider what characteristics are important in the selection of judges.

Materials needed:

- ☆ Handouts -Choose from selection of handout options provided
- ☆ PowerPoint – Fair Courts = Justice

Preparation:

- ☆ Review and become familiar with the PowerPoint, notes, and handouts.
- ☆ Make copies of the selected handouts

Equipment: Computer for PowerPoint, projector and screen. Make arrangements ahead of time with the event coordinator and make sure the coordinator or you have the needed power cords.

Getting started: Optional - As individuals arrive and sign in, it is a good idea to engage with your audience immediately. Walk around and hand out the Judicial Bingo handout and have them answer as many of the questions as they know. Tell participants they can discuss the questions with others seated close by or at the same table. Provide an incentive such as anyone that can answer the entire page will receive a prize. This allows the participants to ease into the content and discover what they already know (and don't know) generally about the courts and the judicial branch. This will begin to generate interest in the topics to be discussed. Do not announce the answers until the conclusion of the full presentation to maintain interest.

As you begin the presentation, provide introductions and an overview of the objectives. Next begin the PowerPoint presentation. Review the notes in advance at the bottom of each slide so the presentation will flow smoothly. Using the warm up handout (top half only), have participants write down their answers individually in response to the scenario on the screen. They should identify the qualities or characteristics they think are most important in judges. Ask for answers from the audience and then show the next slide which highlights what other responses have been identified by other groups.

Next, HIGHLIGHT the qualifications required to be a judge in your state (see state constitution).

Review Remainder of PowerPoint: The PowerPoint will guide you through discussing the:

- ☆ Role of judges in our governmental system
- ☆ Differences between judges and elected officials in other branches of government
- ☆ Processes for selecting and retaining/keeping judges at the state levels
- ☆ How judges are held accountable once selected

Further discussion guided by PowerPoint:

- ☆ The Code of Judicial Conduct
- ☆ Labeling
- ☆ Issues impacting fair and impartial courts today

Small group discussion: At the appropriate point in the presentation, ask the audience to consider what should not influence a judge's decision when deciding a case. Distribute the second half of the warm up activity sheet. Have participants write down their individual responses first and then discuss in small groups for a few minutes. Each small group (five persons in a small group ideally), should try to come to a consensus on the top three responses. Ask for answers (top two or three answers) from each group and list the responses on chart paper. Identify commonalities among groups in the full audience discussion and highlight the indicators with the most votes. Debrief.

As time permits: Ask groups to report on their group discussions and considerations. The presenter should keep track of the indicators identified by each group. Circle the indicators with the most votes and debrief.

Why does this matter: Highlight the importance of learning about the judicial branch and not leaving the ballot blank during judicial elections. Highlight where to locate information on judges in your community and where to find additional resources. Example: IVP website, state and local bar associations, nonpartisan educational groups, etc. See the Keeping Informed Florida handout as an example of the type of information and resources readily available for public review.

Thank participants for their time and attention. Refer to state contact for additional resources and information.

Note: This activity was adapted from Benchmarks, a special project of The Florida Bar.