



These materials have been adapted, with permission from The Florida Bar Benchmarks Adult Civic Education Program, for use in Louisiana. Principal authors of the Florida Benchmarks Program are Annette Boyd Pitts and Richard Levenstein. For assistance with adaptation in other states, contact staff@flrea.org

HOW TO JUDGE JUDICIAL CANDIDATES

Topics addressed:

- Role of judges in government
- How judges differ from other government officials
- Considerations in choosing judges
- Methods of selecting judges
- Sources of information to learn more about judicial candidates

Time needed: 30 – 40 minutes

Overview: Participants will be asked to identify the qualities and characteristics that are most important in selecting judges.

- Using a variety of indicators, participants will pick their top five considerations individually and then in groups at tables.
- A representative from each table will mark a wall chart indicating the group's choices.
- A warm-up activity is included.
- The activity is guided by a PowerPoint. Talk through the topic as you show the slides, summarizing the points. **DO NOT READ** the slides. The last 10 slides launch the discussion about the considerations that audience members think matter most when selecting judges.

Materials Needed:

- **Handout 1** – Numbered sheet with spaces for participants to fill in the most important qualities/characteristics of judges
- **Handout 2** – Chart showing Louisiana's state court system
- **Handout 3** – Considerations in electing trial judges
- **PowerPoint** – "How to Judge Judicial Candidates"
- **Chart paper** – With considerations from Handout 3 filled out. Keep covered initially.
- Markers, pencils

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.

30 – 40 minutes needed



Activity works best for groups of 25 or more



3 Handouts:

Handout 1: sheet to write down qualities of judges

Handout 2: Louisiana State courts overview

Handout 3: Considerations in electing trial judges

Needed:
laptop and projector for PowerPoint



Preparation:

- Review and become familiar with the PowerPoint so you can summarize and not read the slides.
- Make copies of the handouts (Handout 1 is formatted to be cut in half so you can make fewer copies).
- List considerations from Handout 3 on large chart paper.
- Group type and size: Intended for adult civic/nonpartisan groups and may be implemented in a variety of settings including dinner meetings for groups of up to 50 or more. A group of 30 to 40 is ideal.

Timing: This activity covers a lot of ground. As presenter, make your points quickly. When groups discuss and then present their top five considerations for judges, make sure there is time for all groups to have their say.

Getting Started: Distribute Handouts 1 and 2 to tables as participants arrive. They should complete Handout 1 without sharing responses. Once everyone at a table has completed the task, they should discuss their responses with each other. This can be done after introductions or as food is being served and serves as a warm-up activity. **Allow five minutes.**

Go to PowerPoint: During the warm-up, have the title PowerPoint slide on the screen. Present the PowerPoint presentation. (See notes at the bottom of each screen when reviewing in preparation for your presentation.) Pace yourself to cover all of the topics. **Allow 10 to 15 minutes.**

Distribute Handout 3:

- Using the PowerPoint, distribute Handout 3 at slide No. 16.
- Review several of the considerations with the entire group, questioning participants as to the importance of each consideration.
- Distribute enough copies of handout so that each person at tables has one handout and there is one extra for the whole group.
- Ask participants which considerations they feel are important when selecting judicial candidates.
- Discuss which ones they feel should not be factored into selecting judges. Have participants complete Handout 3 first individually then as a group at tables.
- Each group should come to a consensus on its five most important considerations of the ones listed and others that they might add in order of importance. Allow five to seven minutes for group discussion.

Distribute first two handouts to participants at beginning of the session

Allow 5 minutes

Audience members fill out handout 1 individually before discussing answers

**Begin PowerPoint****Allow 10-15 minutes**

to review slides, stopping at the slide that begins list of considerations.

Distribute Handout 3.

Review several considerations with the whole group before they begin discussions at their tables

Considerations:

- Ability to be fair and impartial
- Age
- Areas of practice
- Civic or group affiliations
- Common sense
- Endorsements
- Gender
- Income/socio-economic status
- Individual judicial decisions
- Integrity and honesty
- Judicial record overall
- Legal education and knowledge
- Length of residency in community or state
- Name recognition
- Physical health overall
- Race/ethnic background
- Religion
- Temperament
- Trial experience
- Volunteer service
- Work ethic and punctuality
- Years practicing law

Other: Add other considerations that should be taken into account in selecting judges. Make sure to do this as a whole group so the other factors can be taken into consideration in determining each group's top five.

Post top five responses: When groups have completed their handouts, have each group post its top five responses as tally marks on the chart paper, which is prepared in advance with the list of considerations from Handout 3.

- Leave space on the paper at the bottom to add additional considerations. Circle the top responses for discussion.
- Debrief with audience about the most important considerations to take into account in choosing judges. As time permits, have groups provide reasoning for their responses.
- Discuss if this list would be different for other types of elected officials.

Five minutes.

Continue with PowerPoint: Show the remaining slides.

- Highlight how individuals can find out information on judges before making decisions at the ballot box.
- End with the quote from Sandra Day O'Connor about the crucial role of the courts in U.S. democracy. **Five minutes.**

****Presenter: Please keep tabs on the group's responses and send them to peggy.cotogno@lsba.org so that we can gather a clearer idea of voters' considerations statewide.*

Allow 5 to 7 minutes

for audience to fill out sheets first individually then as groups



Have a person from each group post group's top 5 responses on chart paper

Allow 5 minutes

As time permits, discuss reasons for their picks

Show final slides. Conclude with quote about role of courts in U.S. democracy.



5 Minutes to conclude