



New Judge Office Checklist

Below are some helpful tips for getting your office in order after you are sworn in as a justice of the peace. On the next page, you will find detailed information on how to accomplish each item on the checklist.

Update your information

- Fill out the new judge form with the Office of Court Administration
- Update information with the Texas State Library and Archives Commission
- Get your username and password for the Texas Electronic Vital Events Registrar (TxEVER) if you will be conducting inquests
- Register with the Department of State Health Services for reporting traumatic brain injuries, spinal cord injuries, and submersions if you will be conducting inquests
- Make sure TJCTC has your up-to-date contact information (and an alternate e-mail address for e-blasts if applicable) so that you receive our correspondence
- Consider having your contact information redacted for security purposes

Get your office situated

- Gather precinct maps
- Get Stamps & Seals for office
- Complete the Open Meetings and Open Records class online and file documentation within the first 90 days in office
- Secure an elected official bond
- Set wedding procedures
- Familiarize yourself with county and state human resource rules
- Familiarize yourself with helpful resources

Meet your colleagues

- Meet the other county officials that you will be working with
- Sign bench exchange agreements
- Meet your collections company representative
- If you conduct inquests, have someone introduce you to dispatch and law enforcement
- If you magistrate at the jail, have someone introduce you to the jail staff

*Special thanks to Hon. Mark Russo (Rockwall County)
for sharing his checklist with TJCTC*

Fill out the new judge form with the Office of Court Administration

When a new judge takes office, OCA asks the court to provide them with information about the new judge including when he or she assumed the bench and when the previous judge left the bench. You can provide this information by phone to (512) 463-1625, email at JudInfo@txcourts.gov, or by fax to (512) 463-1865.

After this information is given to OCA, they will send you a New Judge Information sheet to complete. This information is used to produce the Judge Profile Summary for the annual Report of the Texas Judiciary. You can see last year's report at <http://www.txcourts.gov/about-texas-courts/>.

Update your information with the Texas State Library and Archives Commission

You can email TSLAC at slrminfo@tsl.texas.gov or call to update your information at (512) 463-7610. Hours are Monday – Friday 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.

For information regarding the State Retention Schedule, additional training, or other questions, visit TSLAC's website at <https://www.tsl.texas.gov/slr>.

If you ever need records management assistance, you can find your county's government information analyst at this link: <https://www.tsl.texas.gov/slr/local/countylist.html>

Get your username and password for the Texas Electronic Vital Events Registrar (TxEVER) if you will be conducting inquests

The Vital Statistics department has an online system called TxEVER, which is where you submit electronic death certificates.

To become registered, contact your Vital Stats Field Representative at FieldServices@dshs.texas.gov or (512) 776-3010.

For additional information about TxEVER, including how to access support and online training/guides, see Chapter 7 of TJCTC's Inquests Deskbook, which can be found here: <https://www.tjctc.org/tjctc-resources/Deskbooks.html>.

Register with the Department of State Health Services (DSHS) for reporting traumatic brain injuries, spinal cord injuries, and submersions if you will be conducting inquests

The email address injury.web@dshs.texas.gov will be the primary contact point for judges who need to update their information.

Judges may serve as the account manager for their account, or you may appoint one of your staff to handle the account and be in charge of data entry. Upon creating your account, DSHS will send login information, along with training slides and reference resources. They are also available to do training over the phone, if needed.

Make sure TJCTC has your up-to-date contact information (and an alternate e-mail address for e-blasts if applicable) so that you receive our correspondence

Contact April Williams, TJCTC Office Coordinator, at adw167@txstate.edu or (512) 347-9927, ext. 208 to update your information.

We often use Constant Contact to send e-mails to large groups. If you have trouble receiving these e-mails at your county e-mail address, you can use an alternate email address to receive them. You can do this by logging in to our website and updating your Student Information. If you have questions about this, contact Jeff Grajek, TJCTC Web and IT, at jg60@txstate.edu or (512) 347-9927, ext. 202.

Consider having your contact information redacted for security purposes

As a judge, you are allowed to restrict public access of your residence address in tax appraisal records. You can complete the Request for Confidentiality Under Tax Code Sec. 25.025 form and file it with the appraisal district office in the county in which the property is located.

For additional information, visit the Office of Court Administration's website at <http://www.txcourts.gov/programs-services/court-security/court-security-resources/>

Gather precinct maps

Where to get your precinct maps depends on your county. However, a good place to start is the GIS/911 coordinator or the Elections coordinator in your county.

Get Stamps & Seals for office

Any office supply chain will have these. Your county may have a contract with a particular office supply chain. Reach out to your procurement department (possibly your county auditor or county clerk).

Complete the Open Meetings and Open Records class online and file documentation within the first 90 days in office

The Public Information Act and Open Meetings Act require elected and appointed officials to receive training in Texas open government laws. For more information regarding the Open Meetings and Open Records class, visit the Attorney General's website at <https://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/open-government/governmental-bodies/pia-and-oma-training-resources>.

Secure an elected official bond

Each justice of the peace must give a bond payable to the county judge in an amount of not more than \$5,000 conditioned that the justice will faithfully and impartially discharge the duties required by law and promptly pay all money that comes into the justice's hands during the term of office. (Government Code Sec. 27.001) If the official bond of a county officer is required by law to be approved by commissioners court, then the bond, except as required by other law, must be made payable to the county judge and kept and recorded by the county clerk. (Local Government Code Sec. 88.001).

Thank you to the Texas Association of Counties for this information.

Set wedding procedures

Weddings are not a required duty of your office, but many judges choose to perform them to offer the resource to their community. If you decide to perform weddings, you will want to set up a procedure for contacting you, scheduling, and taking payment. This is a great topic to discuss with a mentor or neighboring justice of the peace. The most important *legal* point to remember is that if you perform weddings, the United States Constitution forbids you from discriminating on the basis of race, religion, or sexual orientation.

Remember, Texas Justices of the Peace are not required to perform wedding ceremonies. However, if you do choose to perform **any** weddings, you **must not** refuse to perform certain weddings in an illegally discriminatory manner, such as based on race or sexual orientation. *Loving v. Virginia; Obergefell v. Hodges.*

Familiarize yourself with county and state human resource rules

Contact the person in your county who manages human resources to find what rules and laws you need to learn.

Additional useful information can be found on the Texas Association of Counties (TAC) Risk Control website: <https://www.county.org/Risk-Management/Risk-Control>.

Familiarize yourself with helpful resources

Bookmark and explore the following websites:

- TJCTC: www.tjctc.org
- Texas Association of Counties (TAC): <https://www.county.org/>
- Texas Association of Counties (TAC) New to Office Kit: <https://www.county.org/Resources-for-County-Officials/Essential-Resources-and-Services/New-to-Office-Kit>
- Texas Judicial Branch: <https://www.txcourts.gov/>
- Texas Constitution and Statutes: <https://statutes.capitol.texas.gov/>
- State Commission on Judicial Conduct: <http://www.scjc.texas.gov/>

TJCTC has a document that lists several organizations' contact information that may be useful for courts. This information is often for court use only and should not be shared with the public. If you would like a copy of this document, please contact April Williams at TJCTC and ask for the "Helpful Contact Information" document. April's email address is adw167@txstate.edu. If April is unavailable, call TJCTC and press 1 for a legal question, and the Legal Department will assist you.

Meet the other county officials that you will be working with

Introduce yourself to the constable for your precinct, and to the other justices of the peace and the county judge for your county. Ask one of these people to introduce you to other county officials you may work with, such as the county attorney, the county auditor, the commissioners, etc.

Sign bench exchange agreements

You will most likely have bench exchange agreements with other judges in your county for other judges to cover when you are ill or on vacation. There may also be inquest bench exchanges with judges in neighboring counties for inquests. Talk to another Justice of the Peace in your county or your county judge to find out how to craft these agreements. TJCTC has an inquest bench exchange agreement on our Forms page on www.tjctc.org.

Meet your collections company representative

Your collections company will most likely have a specific representative that will work with you. Ask your court clerk, another justice of the peace, or your county judge to introduce you.

If you conduct inquests, have someone (another JP or County Judge) introduce you to dispatch and law enforcement

Dispatch will be calling you when there is an inquest, so you will need to provide them with your cell phone and other contact information. Likewise, you will be working with law enforcement on site during inquests. It's helpful to have an introduction so that you can meet your colleagues before an inquest has occurred. We recommend asking another JP or the County Judge to introduce you.

If you magistrate at the jail, have someone (another JP or County Judge) introduce you to the jail staff

If you magistrate at the jail, you will be working with the jail staff frequently. It's helpful to make introductions before your first magistration. We recommend asking another JP or the County Judge to introduce you.