

Consistent Messaging with Court Tools

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How many people do you talk to a day at our job?

How about if you include virtual and written communication?

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What information are you trying to get across to people your court interacts with?

Who: People who access the court and stakeholders

What:

- General JP and court information
- There may be some specific info just to you though!

Consistent Messaging – What do we mean?

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Roadmap

Why is consistent communication important?

How do you get info out?

Best Practices

Developing a communication plan

Putting it into action....and revisiting

Special topic: Communication in a crisis

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Communication is never perfect!

Our strategies and plans need to evolve with feedback and changing needs.

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Why is consistent communication important for your court?

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Consistent messaging.....

ensures that your court communicates the same clear, accurate, and professional information across all platforms.

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Why is consistent messaging important?

- Builds trust by avoiding confusion.
- Makes your court's brand reputation better
- Ensures fairness by treating everyone the same

Consistency makes you seem reliable and fair.

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Example of Inconsistency

- Confusion: “What’s the correct fee to file this form?”
- Frustration: “Why did I get told one thing over the phone and another online?”
- Loss of trust: “Can I rely on the court for accurate info?”

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How do you get information out?

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How do you currently communicate in your court?

- Phone – Phone tree?
- Mail
- Email – Auto generated?
- Website (Do you have access to update it?)
- Social media
- In-person communication
- Communication from your database
- Court signage
- Physical handouts at court
- Text message?

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Communication Best Practices

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Best Practices for All Types of Communication – Clarity

- Clarity: Use simple, straightforward language to ensure comprehension, avoiding legal jargon unless absolutely necessary.
- Average reading level for Americans is 6th grade
- Examples of common legalese we see clerks use:
 - ex parte
 - Citation
 - Writ

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Best Practices for All Types of Communication – Professional Tone

Professional Tone: Maintain a respectful, formal tone that reflects the court's authority and neutrality.

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Best Practices for All Types of Communication – Consistency

Ensure that messaging across all modes is aligned in tone, language, and information provided.

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Best Practices for All Types of Communication – Accessibility

Comply with ADA requirements and offer translations or resources in languages commonly spoken in your community.

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Best Practices for All Types of Communication – Neutrality

Remember to remain neutral in your communication

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What are some issues with this? (On the front page of a JP website)

- **Tickets that were issued to juveniles cannot be paid online.**
- **Any offense under the Alcohol and Beverage Code that involve minors under the age of 21 must contact the court for instructions.**
- Only tickets that have been filed with the Courts by the issuing officer and that have not yet been disposed may be accessed by this service.
- I hereby understand that in accordance with Texas Code of Criminal Procedure, Art. 27.14 (c), case payment will result in a waiver of a jury trial and a finding of guilty, which may be reported to the Texas Department of Public Safety.

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Best Practices for All Types of Communication – Accuracy

Double-check all content for errors, ensuring information is factual and up-to-date.

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Email Best Practices

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Email Best practices

- **Subject Lines:** Use clear and specific subject lines to indicate the email's purpose (e.g., "Court Appearance Reminder for Case #12345").
- **Professional Structure:** Include a greeting, body, and closing, with the court's contact details in the signature.
- **Templates:** Develop templates for common communications (e.g., hearing notices, follow-ups) to ensure consistency.

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Email Best practices cont.

- **Email signature:**
 - Photos – Hard to load
 - Quotes – Make sure they are neutral!
- **Color/Font:**
 - ADA accessible
 - Font size: Between 12 and 16
 - Sans – serif fonts like Arial, Helvetica, Verdana, Tahoma. (This is a serif font, but just a bit.) Don't use curlz!
 - Don't use all capital letters in emails

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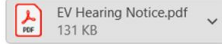
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Examples – In-person Hearing

J2-CV-25-000498: Justin Wilson vs. Bridget Miller



JP2 <JP2@traviscountytx.gov>
To: jmw1400@yahoo.com



Please see the attached notice of your hearing setting. The hearing will be held IN PERSON.

If you have any questions, please contact the court.

Thank you,

Amy Tucker
Office Manager
Judge Randall Slagle
Justice of the Peace, Precinct 2
Fax: 512-854-4535
JP2@traviscountytx.gov

Examples – In-person Hearing Attachment

NOTICE OF EVICTION HEARING

Case Number:
J2-CV-25-000498

JUSTIN WILSON VS. BRIDGET MILLER

In accordance with the Texas Rules of Civil Procedure, you are hereby notified to appear before the Justice Court, Precinct 2 of Travis County, Texas, Judge Randall Slagle presiding, 10409 Burnet Road, Suite 180, Austin, Texas 78758, at 9:30 AM on the 11th day of February, 2025 for your Eviction Hearing.

You should also arrange to have present any witnesses you think are necessary to support your claim. Please contact this office at 512-854-6367 if you have any questions.

YOU MUST BRING ENOUGH COPIES OF YOUR DOCUMENTS TO PROVIDE A SET FOR THE COURT AND EVERY OTHER PARTY.

**** THIS HEARING WILL BE HELD IN PERSON ****

Examples – Virtual Hearing

Please see the attached notice of your hearing setting. The hearing will be held remotely by Zoom with the meeting information on the notice. I have also included a copy of the Zoom invitation below.

Travis County Justice of the Peace 2 is inviting you to a scheduled Zoom meeting.

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://txcourts.zoom.us/j/86275503076>

Meeting ID: 862 7550 3076

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact the court.

Thank you,

Amy Tucker

Office Manager

Judge Randall Slagle

Justice of the Peace, Precinct 2

Fax: 512-854-4535

JP2@traviscountytx.gov

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Examples – Virtual Hearing Attachment

NOTICE OF HEARING

J2-CV-24-001569

**ANAZ, INC. DBA SUNRISE MINI-MART VS. DANNY LEE TERRY DBA A
MODEL PLUMBING**

In accordance with the Texas Rules of Civil Procedure, you are hereby notified the above styled and numbered cause has been set in the Justice Court, Precinct 2 of Travis County, Texas, Judge Randall Slagle presiding, at 9:00 AM on the 13th day of February, 2025 for a Motion to Hold in Contempt hearing.

This cause has been set for a REMOTE HEARING.

<https://txcourts.zoom.us/j/86275503076>

Meeting ID: 862 7550 3076

Any evidence you intend to present must be e-mailed to JP2@TRAVISCOUNTYTX.GOV at least 2 days prior to the hearing. Also, you must either mail the evidence to the opposing party at least 5 days before the hearing or email it to them at least 2 days before the hearing. For further information, consult Part V (Rules 500-510) of the Texas Rules of Civil Procedure, which is available online and also at the court listed on this notice.

If you are unable to appear remotely, please contact the court immediately so proper accommodations can be made.

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Subject line: 24-1567 Ext. Order:

Body:

From Jessica

Court Staff for Judge Randall Slagle

Justice of the Peace Precinct 2

Phone: 512-854-6367

Fax: 512-854-4535

Email: JP2@traviscountytx.gov

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Mail Best Practices

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Mail Best practices (Also, attachments to an email)

- Clear Formatting:** Use professional letterhead and ensure the layout is clean, with adequate margins and spacing.
- Detailed Information:** Provide all necessary details (e.g., date, time, location, case number) to reduce follow-up inquiries.
- Call to Action:** Clearly state what action the recipient needs to take and any deadlines.
- Return Information:** Include a return address and contact details for follow-up questions.
- Review grammar and spelling.
- Consistent and good looking letterhead!**
- Cons**

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CUASE NO: _____ DEFENDANTS NAME: _____

YOU MAY ENTER A PLEA OF NO CONTEST, GUILTY, OR NOT GUILTY.

NO CONTEST

A PLEA OF NO CONTEST STATES YOU ARE NOT CONTESTING THE CHARGES FILED. IF YOU PLEAD NO CONTEST, A FINDING OF GUILTY WILL BE ENTERED BY THE COURT.

GUILTY

A GUILTY PLEA STATES YOU ARE GUILTY OF THE CHARGES AS FILED. THE FINE AND COSTS ON A PLEA OF GUILTY ARE THE SAME AS A PLEA OF NO CONTEST. A GUILTY PLEA MAY ADVERSLY AFFECT YOU IN THE EVENT A CIVIL ACTION IS BROUGHT AGAINST YOU.

NO GUILTY

A NOT GUILTY PLEA STATES YOU ARE NOT GUILTY OF THE CHARGE AS FILED. IF YOU PLEAD NOT GUILTY, A TRIAL DATE WILL BE SET. YOU ARE REQUIRED TO APPEAR FOR TRIAL. FAILING TO APPEAR MAY RESULT IN YOU BEING CHARGED WITH FAILUER TO APPEAR (SECTION 38.11 PENAL CODE) AND A WARRANT BEING ISSUED FOR YOUR ARREST. IT IS NOT REQUIRED THAT YO BE PRESENTED BY AN ATTORNEY. HOWEVER, YOU MAY ELECT TO DO SO. SHOULD YOU BE FOUND GUILTY, YOU WOULD BE RELEASED AT THAT TIME FROM THE CHARGE AGAINST YOU. SHOULD YOU BE FOUND GUILTY, YOUR FINE WOULD BE IN THE AMOUNT NOT TO EXCEED \$500.00 PLUS COSTS PER VIOLATION. NOTICE OF YOUR COURT DATE WILL BE MAILED TO THE ADDRESS YOU HAVE LISTED BELOW.

INITIAL ONE: A \$25.00 TIME PAYMENT FEE WILL BE ASSESSED TO EACH OFFENSE PAID ON OR AFTER THE 31ST DAY OF CONVICTION.

_____ GUILTY AND WAIVE APPEARANCE FOR TRIAL AND WAIVE MY RIGHT TO A TRIAL BY JURY.

_____ NO CONTEST AND WAIVE APPEARANCE FOR TRIAL AND WAIVE MY RIGHT TO A TRIAL BY JURY.

_____ NOT GUILTY AND REQUEST A TRIAL BY _____ JUDGE OR _____ JURY

INITIAL ONE IF YOU HAVE ENTERED A PLEA OF **GUILTY/NO CONTEST**:

_____ I REQUEST THAT I BE ALLOWED TO PAY OFF THE BALANCE IN ___30 DAY EXTENTION ___ PAYMENT PLAN

_____ I CAN PAY IN FULL TODAY. (MONEY ORDERS/CASHIERS CHECKS ONLY/ EXACT CASH & DEBIT/CREDIT CARDS)

_____ I REQUEST TIME TO COMPLETE A DRIVING SAFETY COURSE.

_____ I AM INDIGENT AND REQUEST TO PAY MY FINE/COSTS BY ALTERNATE MEANS.

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Letterhead



JUDGE RANDALL SLAGLE

JUSTICE OF THE PEACE, PRECINCT TWO

TRAVIS COUNTY, TEXAS

10409 Burnet Road, Suite 180, Austin, Texas 78758

*Criminal Division
512-854-4545*

*Fax: 512-854-4535
Email: jp2@traviscountytexas.gov*

*Civil Division
512-854-6367*

January 24, 2025

Phone Best Practices

Phone Best Practices

- **Professional Greeting:** Answer calls with a consistent and professional opening (e.g., "Thank you for calling [Court Name], this is [Your Name], how may I assist you?").
- **Listening Skills:** Actively listen to callers and avoid interrupting them.
- **Documentation:** Record important details from calls in case follow-ups are needed.
- **Hold Policies:** Inform callers if you need to place them on hold, and check back periodically if delays occur.
- **Voicemail:** Ensure voicemail greetings are clear and provide instructions for urgent issues.

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Do you need a script?

Many people will not!

But if you are having issues with inconsistent phone etiquette, or are training a new employee, it can be helpful!

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Phone Best Practices - Scripts

- **Initial Greeting**
 - “Good [morning/afternoon], thank you for calling [Court Name]. This is [Your Name]. How may I assist you today?”
- **If the Caller is Uncertain or Needs Direction**
 - “I’d be happy to help. Could you tell me a little more about what you need so I can direct you to the right person or department?”
- **If They Need Information You Can’t Immediately Provide**
 - “Let me look into that for you. May I place you on a brief hold while I gather the information?”
 - [If holding isn’t an option:] “I’ll need to check on that for you. Can I take your name and number and call you back shortly?”

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Phone Best Practices - Scripts

- **When Transferring Calls**
 - “I’ll transfer you to [Department/Person], who will be able to assist you. Please hold while I connect you.”
 - [After the transfer:] “I’ve connected you with [Department/Person]. Please let me know if you need anything else.”
- **If the Caller Needs to Leave a Voicemail**
 - “It looks like [Person/Department] is unavailable at the moment. May I take a message or transfer you to their voicemail?”
- **Closing the Call**
 - “Thank you for calling [Court Name]. If you have any further questions, please don’t hesitate to reach out. Have a great day!”

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Website Best Practices

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Website Best Practices

- **Ease of Navigation:** Use a user-friendly design with intuitive menus and clear categories.
- **Regular Updates:** Keep court schedules, contact information, and announcements current.
- **Resources:** Provide FAQs, forms, and guides for common tasks, such as filing cases or attending hearings.
- **Accessibility:** Ensure compatibility with screen readers and other assistive technologies.

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Tips On Typography in Web Design

Oh dear

When you use **too many fonts**
see how they **all fight** for attention

**CAPITALIZING FULL PARAGRAPHS IS BAD.
THIS IS EVEN HARDER TO READ WHEN
IT'S BOLDEN. ARE YOU HAVING FUN
READING THIS?**

9. Avoid Coloring Text In Red or Green

Color blindness is a common condition, especially amongst men (8% of men are colour blind), it's recommended to use other cues in addition to

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Social Media Best Practices

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Social Media Best Practices

- **Professional Tone:** Keep posts formal and neutral; avoid any language that could be perceived as biased.
- **Timeliness:** Use social media for real-time updates (e.g., weather closures, emergency notifications).
- **Platform-Specific Optimization:** Tailor content to each platform's strengths (e.g., concise updates on Twitter, detailed posts on Facebook).
- Do not use your personal social media accounts.

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Social Media – Lindke v. Freed

In [*Lindke v. Freed*](#), the U.S. Supreme Court unanimously held that a public servant who:

- had actual authority to speak on behalf of the State on a particular matter, and
- purported to exercise that authority

could open themselves to potential liability if they block people from seeing their posts from their private accounts on social media.

It is a best practice to keep your personal social media accounts and official social media accounts separate and not ask any other employees to post or maintain your personal accounts.

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Social Media – Lindke v. Freed

Had official's account carried a label (example: "this is the personal page of [insert official's name]") or a disclaimer (example: "the views expressed are strictly my own"), the official would be entitled to a heavy (though not irrebuttable) presumption that all the posts on their page were personal and not in their official capacity.

It's probably time to edit your personal pages to make sure that this language is there if you frequently interact with official county pages.

The Court also states, "an official who uses his staff to make a post will be hard pressed to deny that he was conducting government business."

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Social Media – Lindke v. Freed

The Court is very clear that a public official can have private speech and can limit who receives that private speech. There are going to be "hard-to-classify cases," so you will need to talk to your county attorney about any advice or policies they may put into practice in your county.

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In-Person Best Practices

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In-Person Communication Best Practices

- **Polite Interaction:** Greet visitors promptly and politely, acknowledging them even if they must wait.
- **Preparedness:** Staff should have quick access to common resources and answers for frequently asked questions.
- **Nonverbal Communication:** Maintain a professional appearance and use positive body language.
- **Signage and Directions:** Ensure staff can direct visitors effectively to different courtrooms or offices.

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Signage Best Practices

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Signage – Best Practices

- **Visibility:** Place signs in prominent, well-lit areas with clear fonts and high contrast for readability.
- **Brevity:** Use short, straightforward messages to convey essential information quickly.
- **Multilingual:** Include translations to accommodate non-English speakers.
- **Consistency:** Use a unified design for all signage to establish a cohesive look and feel.

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What message is being sent?

What message is being sent?

100 CENTRE

Welcome / Bienvenido

Manhattan Criminal Court and Supreme Court



For wheelchair access, please enter at the South Entrance.



Please check the address on your paperwork to make sure you are in the right place. Other Manhattan courts are located at 1 Centre Street, 111 Centre Street & 314 W. 54th Street (Midtown Community Court).

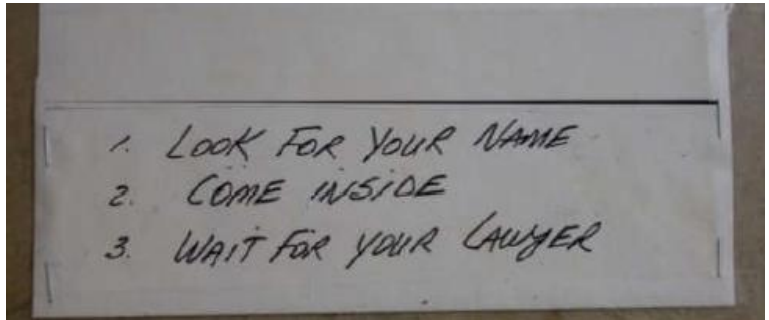


Thank you for your patience as you go through security. Court starts at 9:30am, but your case will be called when you and your lawyer get to the courtroom.



Once you get inside, please check today's calendar in the lobby to find your courtroom and go there immediately. Notify your lawyer that you are here if you have not already.

La traducción al español se encuentra al otro lado.



What message does each send?

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ChatGPT

WARNING! Do not use for legal advice!!!!

Best case use: You can use it to make language more concise, readable, and simplified.

<https://chatgpt.com/>

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Create a motto, vision statement, and/or logo

Use court "branding" to raise awareness and build trust.

Branding may include:

- A logo
- Motto or tagline
- Color palette
- Font
- Shirts!

Use consistent "branding" across platforms.

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Chatbots.....

What is a Chatbot?

A computer program designed to simulate conversation with human users, generally over the internet.

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Chatbots.....

Common Questions:

What are your office hours?

What are my options to pay a traffic ticket?

What is Deferred Disposition?

Can I take defensive driving?

What do I bring to trial?

Can I reschedule my court date?

Can I talk to the Judge?

How do I file a civil case?

How do I file an eviction case?

How do I file an answer?

How do I appeal?

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How do you develop a plan?

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Baby Steps

What if you don't have time to develop a plan?

- Just creating a running of list of things to change and update and working through it as you have time is perfectly valid!

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- **But thinking about how to update or create your communication plan in an organized and repeatable way, will make it easier in the long run.**
- **So let's do it together!**

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Scenario 1: Inconsistent Information Being Provided

JP Court in Jupiter County has 3 clerks, 2 of which are relatively new. They answer most questions via phone, email, pdfs they attach to the email, mailings, and in-person communication. The clerks have noticed that the information provided across these different communication platforms is often incorrect, with outdated info, spelling errors, and inaccuracies.

Task: Use the communication plan to create a strategy that:

- Identifies why inconsistencies occur.
- Outlines steps to standardize information.
- Includes staff involvement and training to ensure uniformity.

Things to Think about:

- Who ensures updates? How will staff be trained? How can you make sure you cover all platforms?

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Scenario 1: Let's Discuss

JP Court in Jupiter County has 3 clerks, 2 of which are relatively new. They answer most questions via phone, email, pdfs they attach to the email, mailings, and in-person communication. The clerks have noticed that the information provided across these different communication platforms is often incorrect, with outdated info, spelling errors, and inaccuracies.

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Scenario 2: Legal Advice Misunderstandings

An office is having trouble with people asking for legal advice. They use in-person communication, phone, email, signage, social media, and a website. How can they use the communication plan to work on this issue?

Task: Develop a communication plan to address this recurring issue, ensuring the public clearly understands the difference between legal advice and information.

Discussion Points:

- How can messaging across all platforms emphasize that the court can only provide legal info not legal advice?
- What phrases or visuals might help clarify this boundary?
- How can staff be trained to respond to these inquiries consistently?

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Scenario 2: Let's Discuss

An office is having trouble with people asking for legal advice. They use in-person communication, phone, email, signage, social media, and a website. How can they use the communication plan to work on this issue?

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Scenario 3: Natural Disaster Response

Problem: A flood has damaged the court building, and court is canceled. The public needs to know what steps to take, including how to reschedule hearings, contact court staff, and access emergency resources.

- **Task:** Create a disaster communication plan that ensures timely and accurate updates via multiple channels (e.g., social media, phone, email, website, signage).

Discussion Points:

- What information needs to be communicated immediately?
- Which channels are most effective for urgent updates?
- How can the court prepare in advance for future emergencies?

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Scenario 3: Let's Discuss

A flood has damaged the court building, and court is canceled. The public needs to know what steps to take, including how to reschedule hearings, contact court staff, and access emergency resources.

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Thank you

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