



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 following pages, 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 and file required form with the Texas State Library and Archives Commission.
- ☐ Get your username and password for the Texas Electronic Vital Events Registrar (TxEVER) if you conduct inquests.
- ☐ Register with the Department of State Health Services for reporting traumatic brain injuries, spinal cord injuries, and submersions if you conduct 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 TJCTC correspondence.
- ☐ Consider having your contact information redacted for security purposes

Get your office situated

- ☐ Gather precinct maps (these are online in many counties).
- ☐ Get stamps & seals for your office.
- ☐ Complete the Open Meetings and Open Records class online and file documentation within 90 days.
- ☐ Secure an elected official bond.
- ☐ Set various policies and procedures (details below).
- ☐ 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 applicable).
- ☐ 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 they 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 and file the required form with the Texas State Library and Archives Commission.

Find out if you are the records management officer (RMO) for your court's records or if you have a county-wide RMO. There is a required form that all justices of the peace must file with TSLAC, whether they are the RMO or not: "Form SLR 512 – Records Management Policy and Declaration of Compliance by an Elected County Official." The form and instructions for filling it out and filing it can be found here: <https://www.tsl.texas.gov/slrml/forms>.

For more information about records management/retention and policies you must create, adopt, and/or follow, see Chapter 1 of the Recordkeeping and Reporting Deskbook.

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

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

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.

Get your username and password for the Texas Electronic Vital Events Registrar (TxEVER) if you will be conducting inquests. *You will also be required to get a background check, so do not delay contacting Vital Statistics. If you do, it could delay your ability to access the system and perform your inquest duties.*

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

To become registered, contact your Vital Statistics 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 conduct 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 oversee 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 Francisco Paredes, TJCTC Office Coordinator, at fjp12@txstate.edu or (512) 347-9927 to update your information.

TJCTC uses an email system called Emma 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 your TJCTC profile and changing your email. If you have questions about this, contact Jeff Grajek, TJCTC Web and IT, at jg60@txstate.edu or (512) 347-9927.

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 (link found on the website listed below) and file it with the appraisal district office in the county in which the property is located.

For additional information, read Chapter 7 of the Officeholding and Ethics Deskbook and 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. In many counties these are now available online.

Get stamps & seals for your 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 (this could be your county auditor, county clerk, county treasurer, or another elected official in smaller counties).

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*.

More information can be found on the Texas Association of Counties website – www.county.org.

Set various policies and procedures

1. Weddings

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*.

Weddings are discussed more fully in Chapter 3 of the Officeholding and Ethics Deskbook.

2. *Confidentiality*

All courts must implement a confidentiality plan. This policy must be provided to existing employees at least every other year, and all new employees must be trained on the policy before performing any substantive work. TJCTC's sample policy can be found under the General Officeholding and Miscellaneous Forms section on TJCTC's Forms webpage:

<https://www.tjctc.org/tjctc-resources/forms.html>

3. *Juvenile Diversion Plan*

All justice courts must have a juvenile diversion plan available for inspection. You may choose to adopt the plan that the prior judge used or you may choose to change it. Anonymous sample diversion plans can be found in TJCTC's self-paced module on juvenile diversions, found at <https://www.tjctc.org/onlinelearning/selfpacedmodules.html>.

4. *Inquests (if applicable)*

Meet with your doctor to discuss any health precautions you may choose to take. The county is required to provide or reimburse the cost of vaccines for any disease you may be exposed to in doing inquests.

5. *Public Access to Records and Reporting Requirements*

Ensure that your office is following proper procedures for responding to record requests and fulfilling reporting requirements. For more information, see Chapters 2 and 3 of the Officeholding Deskbook.

6. *Cremation Waiver Policy*

Each judge's office must have a written policy available for the public regarding procedures for a person to waive the 48-hour waiting period and how the judge will ensure to process the requests quickly. The policy must also address how to place a request both during and after business hours. Health and Safety Code § 716.004.

More info in Chapter 6, Section C of the Inquests Deskbook

Familiarize yourself with county and state human resource rules.

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

Additional useful information can be found on the Texas Association of Counties (TAC) Risk Management website: <https://www.county.org/resources/resource-library/rms/risk-management-and-risk-control-training>.

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/resource-library/resources-for-officials/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 for court use only and should not be shared with the public. If you would like a copy of this document, please contact Francisco Paredes at TJCTC and ask for the "Helpful Contact Information" document. Francisco's email address is isfjp12@txstate.edu. If Francisco 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 need bench exchange agreements with other judges in your county or surrounding counties 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 a neighboring county, or your county judge to find out your local procedures regarding bench exchanges. TJCTC has an inquest bench exchange agreement on the TJCTC Forms page at <https://www.tjctc.org/tjctc-resources/forms.html>.

Meet your collections company representative (if applicable).

If your county contracts with a collections company, they 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, 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.