

**KANSAS CITY METROPOLITAN BAR ASSOCIATION
YOUNG LAWYERS SECTION
ON-LINE JUDICIAL HANDBOOK**

I. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The On-Line Judicial Handbook provides members of the Kansas City Metropolitan Bar Association (“KCMBA”) Internet access to information regarding the unwritten customs and requirements of state and federal judges located throughout the metropolitan area. The Judicial Handbook is accessible to members only through the KCMBA website, which is KMCBA.org. The Judicial Surveys address the judges’ approach to courtroom equipment/decorum, the holding of pretrial conferences, scheduling issues, the handling of administrative tasks, discovery, briefing, and motion practice, and trial issues such as objections, exhibits and instructions.

II. PROJECT PLANNING/DEVELOPMENT

A. Identification Of Need

The program is unique because every member of the KCMBA can access On Line Judicial Handbook through the Internet free of charge. By publishing the Judicial Handbook through the Internet instead of a written copy in traditional book form, the information can be updated on a frequent basis that is cost efficient and effective. For example, when a new judicial appointment is made, the affiliate can request that the judge fill out a survey and immediately add the information to the Internet site. Likewise, surveys also can be removed from the site as judges retire or receive other appointments. The ease at which information can be added, deleted and enhanced with little to no cost provides a significant benefit that is not available by publishing the information in traditional book form.

Further, there is an unlimited opportunity to expand the judicial information that is available. Surveys addressing specialty courts can be created and published on the Internet site. For example, information regarding bankruptcy, juvenile, domestic and drug enforcement courts can be added. Because specialty courts vary significantly from state to state, each affiliate will be able to create surveys that address the specific issues relevant to their jurisdictions.

The concept originated out of necessity in that many of the local state and federal judges found that many of the lawyers appearing before them were unfamiliar with the unwritten customs of their courtrooms. Because Kansas City borders two different state and federal court systems, Missouri and Kansas, the differences between the numerous courthouses can be particularly troublesome. Unfortunately, neither the state rules nor the local rules address many of the items peculiar to each judge's courtroom. As a result, the KCMBA created a survey that catalogs, synthesizes and distributes the unwritten "common law of Kansas City."

B. Determination Of Project Goals And Design

1. Decisions to be made

There needs to be an organizational meeting(s) to discuss and identify persons on the bench who could provide valuable input and cooperation in surveying their court system. The introductory meeting should also focus on forming a committee for purposes of formulating a survey for the state and federal systems. Also, a final edit committee should be formed which should include senior members of the state or federal bar that are willing to volunteer their time as well.

2. Project Design

Due to the fact that the handbook appears on-line, the design possibilities are endless. Each affiliate can create a design that it deems appropriate and effective. As a result, there is not formula format for how the On-Line Judicial Handbook should appear. The KCMBA's format is simple and intended to be more informational than pleasing to the eye. KCMBA's membership includes lawyers that range from twenty-four (24) to seventy (70) plus years old. The membership also has a varying degree of computer and Internet knowledge. As a result, the KCMBA decided that the key to providing the On-Line Handbook to its membership was to make the website easy to follow in order for lawyers to access the information. The actual design, which is available on CD-ROM, was created by a member of the KCMBA staff.

3. Decision Making Process

The committee consisted of a Chair, Co-Chair and approximately eight (8) other members. The KCMBA staff also provided great assistance and guidance throughout the project. Most of the decisions in planning the project were made by the Chairs, as well as certain members of the KCMBA staff.

The KCMBA hosted several lunch meetings at its headquarters to discuss the project and allocate responsibilities. In addition, the committee and KCMBA staff participated in a number of conference calls and e-mail exchanges as the project progressed.

4. Considerations In Project Planning

a. Personnel

Volunteers are crucial to this project. The KCMBA On-Line Judicial Handbook was created by approximately ten (10) young lawyers who participated in its planning and implementation over a twelve (12) month period. The volunteers attended the planning sessions, drafted the surveys, contacted and followed up with the judges, and forwarded the necessary information to the KCMBA for input on the website.

b. Revenue Availability/Fund Raising

Since the crux of the project is to provide the on-line handbook to members free of charge via the Internet, the KCMBA has not attempted to turn the surveys into a revenue-generating project. Other affiliates are free to consider doing so.

c. Equipment Requirement

The only “equipment” requirement is that the affiliate has a website where the information can be placed. In addition, if the affiliate does not have a staff member or someone else that can input the information on-line and create the links to access the surveys, outside assistance may be necessary.

III. IMPLEMENTATION – HOW TO REPLICATE THE PROJECT

In order to facilitate the gathering of the information, separate surveys were prepared for the state judges and the federal judges in the Kansas City metropolitan area. The surveys cover general categories of information not covered in any other reference source. Namely, it addresses the judges' attitude and approach to courtroom equipment/decorum, the holding of pretrial conferences, the handling of administrative tasks in each division, pretrial matters, briefing, voir dire, expert witnesses, objections/exhibits/depositions, instructions and other general matters. In order to provide uniformity in reporting, the same state survey was submitted to all of the state court judges. Each survey was tabulated, cataloged and indexed. The same was done for the federal judges, but that survey was modified and expanded to account for the difference in federal practice.

A. Timetable

The actual time it takes to implement the On-Line Judicial Handbook will depend largely upon the number of courts and judges in the affiliate's jurisdiction. Because Kansas City is a border city for both Missouri and Kansas, the KCMBA's on-line handbook includes seven different courts in the Kansas City Metropolitan area: 1) Seventh Judicial Circuit of Missouri, Clay County; 2) Sixteenth Judicial Circuit of Missouri, Jackson County; 3) Sixth Judicial Circuit of Missouri, Platte County; 4) United States District Court for the Western District of Missouri; 5) Tenth Judicial District of Kansas, Johnson County; 6) Twenty-Ninth Judicial District of Kansas, Wyandotte County; and 7) United States District Court for the District of Kansas. These seven (7) courts have approximately seventy-five (75) judges.

In addition, the timeframe will depend upon the technology available to the affiliate. For example, each affiliate will need to address whether it has someone on its staff that can input the information on the website, or whether it needs to obtain assistance from an outside source.

Taking these considerations into account, the KCMBA estimates that an affiliate should contemplate the project taking approximately twelve (12) months to implement. Based upon this estimation, the KCMBA provides the following overview of tasks to complete during that period:

- Organizational meetings to form a committee for purposes of formulating a survey for the state and federal systems. Also, a final edit sub-committee should be formed.
- Distribution of the surveys with specific instructions on completion, due date and person to contact if questions arise as to the nature of the information sought.
- Surveys should be gathered, reviewed for completeness, typed up and tabulated. In addition, a layout and editing committee should be formed for purposes of including other useful local information such as biographical and pictorial information on the judges.
- The affiliate should consider whether a photograph should be obtained from each judge. Do not use or rely upon general photographs kept in other texts or manuals. Each judge should be asked to submit a publishable photograph and possibly a biography for inclusion in the handbook.
- The layout and editing committee should prepare a basic design format for the internet site. The design should focus on clarity and access to the information.
- The final draft should be closely edited, particularly as to the form and content of each judge's responses, insuring no typographical errors or misstatements. When in doubt, the judge should be contacted.
- In order to insure repeat participation by the judges at a future date, the completed handbook should be sent to each individual judge under correspondence of the affiliate thanking them for their participate.

- The on-line survey should be publicized so the affiliate's membership is aware of the project and how to access it.

B. Recruitment And Training of Volunteers/Personnel

No specialized training is needed for the On-Line Judicial Handbook. However, volunteers are a crucial component. The volunteers are needed to create the judicial surveys, contact numerous judges, follow up on surveys, and place the project on-line.

C. Publicity

Because the On-Line Judicial Handbook provides an important member service, the project should be heavily publicized. Once the project was available on-line, a detailed article was published in the "*KC Counselor*," a magazine distributed to all of its five thousand (5,000) members. The article explained the project to the KCMBA membership and detailed how the information could be accessed. In addition, the KCMBA has provided fliers and other reminder information at various CLEs and other meetings where the organization's membership is present.

D. Day-To-Day Operations

Once the project is available on-line, there are no day-to-day duties that must be performed to keep the project running. However, in order to keep the on-line handbook up to date, the affiliate should keep apprised of changes to the bench(s). For example, when a new judicial appointment is made the affiliate would need to remove the survey of the retired judge and request that the new judge fill out a survey and immediately add the information to the website. The KCMBA keeps its on-line handbook current by charging a young lawyer committee with updating the project each year.

IV. EVALUTION AND IMPACT

The On-Line Judicial Handbook has been very successful and popular among KCMBA members. Creating the on-line handbook has eliminated confusion between the bench and bar as to matters of basic custom and procedure. Likewise, the handbook has also provided an opportunity for the judges to see how other judges handle the same matters. This project has also created uniformity or, in some instances, identified a lack thereof. By fostering a better understanding of what the bench expects of the bar, the KCMBA, in preparing the handbook, has fulfilled two of its primary missions: educating its members and providing a valuable member service.

V. BIBLIGOGRAPHY/OTHER RESOURCES

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