

Judicial Pathways Mentoring Plan Curriculum



Revised May 2026

How to Use This Plan

This curriculum supports attorneys on a pathway to the bench through nine topic areas covering judicial identity, demeanor, skill development, and well-being. Check ☐ in the right column as each item is completed. Section 8 requires completing at least two activities; all other sections should be completed in full. All hyperlinked resources are preserved and clickable.

1. UNDERSTANDING YOUR PROFESSIONAL "WHY"

Action	Mark Completed
Engage Mentee in a reflective exercise on professional identity: • How does Mentee define their professional identity as it stands today? • How does Mentee define professional success — and how has that definition evolved over the course of their legal career? • What professional or personal characteristics have helped Mentee succeed in practice so far? • How might those strengths translate to the bench — and which ones might require adjustment?	☐
Assist Mentee in articulating the “why” behind their desire to pursue a judicial career pathway: • What specific aspects of a judicial position inspire or interest Mentee? • Describe the ideal judge from Mentee’s perspective — what qualities, approaches, and values define judicial excellence in their view? • What experience and skills would Mentee bring to a judicial position that would make them an effective and fair judicial officer? • How does the desire for a judicial position connect to Mentee’s broader sense of purpose and professional identity?	☐
If Mentee is unsure of which type of judicial officer they aspire to be, discuss the various types of judicial officers and the benefits and challenges of serving at different levels: • State vs. federal: appointment processes, tenure, jurisdiction, and culture. • County vs. district court: volume, subject matter, and community connection.	☐

Action	Mark Completed
- Magistrate vs. judge: scope of authority, pathway to elevation, and role differences. - Municipal court, administrative law judge, and other quasi-judicial positions. - Elected vs. appointed bench: how the path differs and what each requires.	
Discuss the personal meaning of serving on the bench — not just the career path, but the calling: - What does Mentee hope to contribute to justice in Colorado? - How does Mentee’s background, life experience, and community connection inform what kind of judge they would be? - What is Mentee willing to give up or change in pursuing this path, and is that trade-off aligned with their values?	☐

2. CULTIVATING JUDICIAL Demeanor

Action	Mark Completed
Engage Mentee in a reflective exercise on temperament as a foundation for judicial demeanor. How does Mentee’s temperament and emotional regulation as an individual influence what their temperament as a judicial officer might be? What are the strengths and challenges of Mentee’s personal temperament? Use Judicial Temperament, Explained by Terry A. Maroney to guide your conversation. - Discuss the distinction between temperament as a fixed trait and demeanor as a practiced discipline. - Explore how Mentee’s responses to stress, conflict, and ambiguity in their current practice foreshadow how they might respond on the bench. - Identify two or three specific areas of temperament Mentee wants to strengthen before pursuing appointment.	☐
Strong decision-making is not the only qualification of judicial demeanor. Empathy — the ability to understand a situation from another’s perspective — affects how judges judge. Use Mindfulness and Judging by Jeremy Fogel to guide your conversation on how Mentee’s strengths or challenges in empathy will impact their future judicial temperament. - Discuss the role of mindfulness in judicial decision-making: staying present, avoiding reactive judgment, and maintaining equanimity under pressure. - Explore how Mentee currently practices — or could practice — mindfulness in their legal work. - Discuss how empathy and impartiality coexist in a well-functioning judicial temperament.	☐

Action	Mark Completed
Consider the elements of “Judicial Excellence” and how Mentee would rate their strengths and challenges in each category. Assist Mentee in making a plan for improving those elements that are more challenging: • Ethics and integrity: upholding the actual and perceived integrity of the judiciary. • Engagement and development: embracing feedback and seeking ongoing professional growth. • Well-being and self-care: managing stress and maintaining physical and psychological health. • Legal and operational knowledge: understanding the law and court operations relevant to the assignment. • Analytical and decision-making skills: evaluating information and taking timely, sound action. • Self-awareness and bias management: understanding how personal perspective impacts decision-making. • Docket and courtroom management: planning, scheduling, and facilitating case flow. • Communication and courtroom presence: interacting effectively with all court participants. • Consensus-building and conflict resolution: facilitating forward progress toward resolution.	☐
Discuss how AI and technology are changing the courtroom and judicial decision-making environment: • How courts are grappling with AI-generated evidence, deepfakes, and algorithmic tools used by parties. • The judge’s role in evaluating the reliability and admissibility of AI-related evidence. • Judicial education resources on technology in the courtroom. • How Mentee can develop technology literacy as part of judicial readiness.	☐

3. BUILDING COMMUNITY TO SUPPORT JUDICIAL AMBITIONS

Action	Mark Completed
Discuss whether voluntary professional and community service is a necessary commitment for persons holding public office, and what forms of service Mentee has been involved with in the past and wishes to engage with in the future. • Discuss how civic and community engagement demonstrates the values of public service and builds the relationships and credibility essential to a judicial appointment. • Identify two or three service commitments Mentee could pursue that align with their values and judicial aspirations.	☐

Action	Mark Completed
Discuss how to sustain these commitments alongside the demands of a legal practice and family life.	
What type of community support does Mentee have in their judicial aspirations? Where is community support lacking? Partner with Mentee to make an action plan for growing their support and influence in communities that are meaningful to them: - Identify key supporters: mentors, colleagues, community leaders, and bar association contacts. - Identify gaps: communities or professional networks where Mentee is less known or connected. - Discuss how to build visibility and credibility in those gaps without compromising judicial impartiality or the appearance of politicking. - Develop a 12-month relationship-building action plan aligned with Mentee's timeline for pursuing appointment.	☐
Discuss the impact of online social networking on judicial ambitions. Engage Mentee in a reflective exercise on their past and present social media use and how their social media history will impact a future judicial appointment: - Review the Colorado Code of Judicial Conduct's guidance on social media for judges and judicial candidates. - Discuss how to audit existing social media accounts for content that could be problematic in a judicial nomination process. - If a social media presence is important to Mentee, discuss how to appropriately incorporate social media use into their role as a judge going forward. - Explore how judicial candidates in Colorado have used and navigated social media during nomination processes.	☐
Attend a meeting of an organized bar association or judicial networking event together. Introduce Mentee to other attorneys and judges in attendance. Discuss the advantages of bar association involvement in pathways to the bench: - Which bar sections and committees most directly develop judicial readiness in Mentee's practice area? - How bar leadership roles demonstrate the qualifications sought in judicial candidates. - Discuss local, state, and national associations available to Colorado attorneys with judicial ambitions.	☐
Discuss the role of writing and public speaking in building a judicial pathway: - Writing legal articles, CLE materials, or bar publication pieces as a demonstration of expertise. - Speaking at CLEs, law school events, or community forums as a visibility and credibility builder. - How judicial nominating commissions view a candidate's record of public engagement and professional contribution.	☐

4. PROFESSIONAL SKILL DEVELOPMENT FOR PROSPECTIVE JUDGES

Action	Mark Completed
Discuss Mentee’s strengths and challenges in the following skill sets comprising judicial excellence. For each, invite Mentee to rate themselves and discuss specific experiences that demonstrate strength or reveal room for growth: Ethics & Integrity Understanding the ethical challenges faced by judges and how to properly address them to uphold the actual and perceived integrity of the judiciary. Engagement & Professional Development Engaging in the work of the assignment, educating the local community, and supporting colleagues in executing the mission of the court. Embracing performance feedback and seeking out opportunities for professional development. Well-Being & Self-Care Engaging in self-care practices to manage stress and maintain physical and psychological health — especially critical on the bench, where the emotional weight of difficult cases can accumulate over time. Legal & Operational Knowledge Understanding the legal and operational matters relevant to the assignment. Building knowledge from relevant disciplines and understanding their implications in daily work. Analytical & Decision-Making Skills Using analytical and problem-solving skills to evaluate the available information and take the best action possible in a timely manner. Articulating clear and reasoned decisions. Self-Awareness & Bias Management Understanding how one’s personal perspective, values, preferences, mental state, and way of thinking can impact decision-making and others’ perceptions of fairness. Developing and applying strategies to manage emotions and address biases in judgment and behavior. Docket & Courtroom Management Directing docket and courtroom operations by planning and coordinating schedules, managing case processing timelines, and facilitating information exchange between parties in a case, court staff, and other stakeholders. Communication & Courtroom Presence Interacting effectively with all those who work in or appear before the court in a manner conducive to a fair process and just outcomes. Listening attentively to others and providing clear and effective communication to ensure a shared understanding of the issues in the case, court processes, and decisions. Consensus-Building & Conflict Resolution Engaging with parties and stakeholders to build consensus on matters that will allow for forward case progress and a focus on reaching a resolution.	☐

Action	Mark Completed
Based on Mentee’s self-assessment of skill strengths and deficits, thought-partner with Mentee to create a development plan: - Professional development resources: CLEs, judicial education programs, and Colorado judicial branch training. - Practice experience: opportunities to build the skill in current practice before appointment. - Additional mentoring or coaching: who else could support development in specific areas? - Shadowing opportunities: observing current judges in courtroom settings to learn by example. - Set a 6–12 month timeline with specific milestones for each development area.	☐

5. CULTURAL EMPATHY AS A REQUIRED JUDICIAL SKILL

Action	Mark Completed
Discuss why ethnic and national culture matters for judges, because of the ways culture greatly impacts how people: - Define justice, conflict, and disorder, and determine when it is appropriate to involve third parties — including the state — in resolving problems and conflicts. - Describe events or “what happened” — how narrative, memory, and perspective vary across cultures. - Fashion responses or solutions to problems and conflicts, including attitudes toward negotiation, authority, and deference. Discuss specific examples from Mentee’s practice where cultural differences have shaped how a client, witness, or party presented their situation — and how Mentee navigated that.	☐
Engage Mentee in a reflective exercise to assess their current level of cultural empathy. Use the Cultural Competence Self-Assessment Checklist as a guide in your discussion. Review results together and identify specific areas where Mentee has strong cultural competency and areas requiring intentional growth.	☐
Work with Mentee to create an action plan for improving cultural empathy as part of their preparation and pathway to the bench: - Identify specific communities or cultural contexts relevant to the judicial district(s) Mentee is considering. - Explore CLEs, community engagement, or immersive learning opportunities to build cultural knowledge. - Discuss how implicit bias — including biases Mentee may not be aware of — can affect judicial decision-making, and strategies to identify and interrupt those biases.	☐

Action	Mark Completed
- Review the National Judicial College and state court resources on cultural competency for judges. - Set measurable goals: by what date will Mentee complete a cultural competency CLE? Attend a community event in an unfamiliar cultural context? Read a designated resource?	
Discuss how implicit bias training and cultural competency intersect with judicial ethics: - The Colorado Code of Judicial Conduct's requirements regarding impartiality and the prohibition on bias. - How acknowledging the existence of implicit bias is compatible with — and required by — judicial ethics. - Resources: ABA Implicit Bias Initiative, National Center for State Courts, and Colorado Judicial Branch DEI resources.	☐

6. THE NOMINATION PROCESS

Action	Mark Completed
Review with Mentee the Colorado judicial nominating process from start to finish: - The role of the Judicial Nominating Commission and how members are selected. - Vacancy announcement, application deadlines, and eligibility requirements. - The application review and ranking process by the Commission. - The Governor's selection from the Commission's nominees and the appointment process. - The retention election process for appointed judges. - How the process differs across levels (district court, Court of Appeals, Supreme Court) and types (state vs. federal, county court vs. district court).	☐
Review in detail the Colorado judicial application. If Mentee is considering applying in the near future: - Provide guidance for completing each section of the application, including writing samples, references, and personal statement. - Discuss which current experiences and accomplishments to highlight and how to frame them for a judicial audience. - Identify gaps in Mentee's application and create an action plan to address them before applying. If Mentee is not applying in the near future: - Assist Mentee in creating an action plan for obtaining the requisite experience to become a judge.	☐

Action	Mark Completed
• Help Mentee vision future responses to application questions and identify experiences to build toward those responses. • Create a timeline with short- and long-term goals and actions.	
Engage Mentee in mock judicial nominating commission interviews and mock interviews with the Governor’s office. Provide constructive feedback and support regarding important aspects of presentation, preparedness, and substance of responses: • Typical Commission interview questions: judicial philosophy, approach to difficult cases, ethics scenarios, and case management. • How to discuss prior decisions, mistakes, or controversial positions professionally and authentically. • Presentation skills: poise, listening, tone, and managing nerves in a formal interview setting. • How to articulate a judicial philosophy that is principled without being politically coded.	☐
Discuss the practical realities of the nomination timeline and process: • How long the process typically takes from application to appointment in Colorado. • What candidates should expect during the Commission review period, including background checks and community input. • How to maintain professional obligations and client relationships during an active application process. • What to do if an application is unsuccessful — how to seek feedback and plan for a future application.	☐

7. PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY & WELL-BEING

Action	Mark Completed
Discuss how the public life of a judge blends with Mentee’s personal and family life. Assist Mentee in reflecting on the positive and negative ways the public life of a judge will impact their personal life: • The constraints on a judge’s personal life: social media, public statements, political activity, and community involvement. • The impact on family members who did not choose a public role. • The emotional and psychological weight of high-stakes decisions, trauma exposure, and public scrutiny. • Financial changes: how judicial compensation compares to current practice earnings and how to plan for any difference. • The rewards: what aspects of the judicial role will bring Mentee the greatest personal and professional satisfaction?	☐

Action	Mark Completed
How to discuss these trade-offs honestly with family members before pursuing appointment.	
Resilience Planning: Engage Mentee in a reflection on resilience — particularly in the context of the unique stressors of the judicial role. Consider: Three Ways Lawyers Can Become More Resilient Survival Skill No. 1 for Lawyers: Emotional Resilience - Discuss the specific resilience demands of judicial service: secondary trauma from difficult cases, isolation of the role, public criticism, and the weight of consequential decisions. - Identify what Mentee will do to protect and replenish their resilience reserves as a judge.	☐
Well-Being Assessment: Engage Mentee in a self-reflective exercise on the six dimensions of well-being. Use the ABA Well-Being Toolkit for Lawyers and Legal Employers to build an action plan addressing self-identified gaps: Emotional: Recognize and manage emotions; seek mental health support when needed. Especially important for judges who absorb others’ trauma daily. Occupational: Cultivate satisfaction, growth, and enrichment in work; financial stability. Consider how compensation and career trajectory shift on the bench. Intellectual: Pursue continuous learning; judicial education programs, new legal developments, and interdisciplinary knowledge all support this dimension. Spiritual: Develop a sense of meaning and purpose — the judicial role is deeply purposeful and can be a powerful source of spiritual fulfillment. Social: Build connection and belonging. Judges can experience significant isolation; proactive social connection is essential. Physical: Maintain activity, nutrition, sleep; minimize harmful substance use. The sedentary nature of judicial work makes intentional physical activity especially important.	☐
Defining Professional & Personal “Success” on the Bench: Work with Mentee to build a sustainable definition of success appropriate to judicial service. - Traditional concepts of success (power, recognition, wealth) and how they apply — or don’t — to a judicial career. - What does it mean to succeed as a judge? Whose measure of success matters: colleagues, bar, public, litigants? - How to define success in a role where outcomes are constrained by law and you cannot always give people what they want. - Build 2–3 primary goals from a values-based definition of judicial success. You’ve only failed if you’ve given up on achieving your definition.	☐
Assessment of Current Professional Identity: Ask Mentee to answer “What do you do?” Work together to expand the answer to include a broader view of	☐

Action	Mark Completed
Mentee’s strengths, interests, and professional passions — and how those will carry forward into the judicial role. • Discuss how the answer to “What do you do?” will change when Mentee becomes a judge, and how Mentee feels about that shift in identity. • Explore what aspects of current practice Mentee will miss and how to find analogues on the bench.	
Discuss secondary trauma and vicarious traumatization as occupational hazards of judicial service: • What types of cases in Mentee’s target judicial assignment are most likely to generate secondary trauma (e.g., child abuse, domestic violence, catastrophic injury)? • Proactive strategies: peer support, supervision, mindfulness, and scheduled recovery time. • Colorado Lawyer Assistance Program (COLAP) resources available to judges. • How to model and normalize well-being practices for court staff and law clerks.	☐

8. DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION, AND ACCESSIBILITY (COMPLETE AT LEAST TWO)

Action	Mark Completed
Discuss what diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility mean to both Mentee and Mentor, and how these concepts manifest in the legal profession and the judiciary. Create a safe space for conversation on how the legal system and judiciary are incorporating these values and how they can continue to improve. Describe what an ideal bench would look like based on these principles.	☐
Discuss the dimensions of identity for Mentor and Mentee. Which identities are most salient? How have they served each person in the legal profession? How have they created challenges or limitations — and how might they show up in the judicial role?	☐
Discuss roadblocks and challenges each may have experienced due to underrepresented identities. What strategies were used? What resources were helpful? What was missing, and how might those gaps be addressed — including in the judicial nomination and appointment process?	☐
Engage in a cultural empathy self-assessment using the Cultural Competence Self-Assessment Checklist. Discuss how cultural empathy supports fair and equitable judicial decision-making and how it can be developed as a judicial skill.	☐
Attend a diversity awareness or training workshop or CLE together. Discuss takeaways and next steps. See:	☐

Action	Mark Completed
CBA-CLE Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Courses	
Discuss various career paths and how they relate to Mentee’s personal and professional identities and judicial goals: - Examine resources for underrepresented attorneys in organizations appropriate to Mentee’s career path to the bench. - Discuss how different prior career paths (Big Law, public defender, prosecution, legal aid, government) influence judicial readiness and perspective.	☐
Discuss DEI specifically in the context of the judiciary and judicial appointment: - The current composition of the Colorado bench: where underrepresentation exists and why it matters for public trust and justice. - How Colorado’s judicial nomination process has been designed to promote diversity and where gaps remain. - How Mentee’s unique background, identity, and perspective would contribute to a more representative judiciary. - Resources and networks for underrepresented attorneys pursuing the bench: Colorado diversity bar organizations, national judicial diversity programs, and CAMP resources.	☐

DEI Resources

Videos:

- [Reimagining Law: DEI in the Legal Profession — What’s Working and What Isn’t](#)
- [Reimagining Law: Systemic Racism in the Legal Profession](#)
- [Reimagining Law: Supporting LGBTQ+ Legal Professionals](#)
- [Reimagining Law: Creating a Sense of Belonging in the Legal Profession](#)
- [Reimagining Law: How Lawyers Can Combat Discriminatory Behavior](#)

Articles:

- [Commission’s DEI News and Articles](#)
- [3 Ways Lawyers Can Promote DEI with the CBA Racial Justice Coalition](#)
- [Inclusive Language is Allyship](#)

American Bar Association:

- [Bias Interrupters Project](#) — You Can’t Change What You Can’t See: Interrupting Racial and Gender Bias in the Legal Profession
- [Model Diversity Survey](#) from the Commission on Racial and Ethnic Diversity in the Profession
- [Implicit Bias Videos and Toolkit](#) from the ABA Diversity and Inclusion Center

9. INTEGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF "WHOLE-PERSON LAWYERING"

Action	Mark Completed
COMPLETE AT LEAST TWO OF THE FOLLOWING	
This component addresses the unique contribution of the Mentee to the legal profession and the judiciary while working with the Mentor to shape an approach that expresses the whole person as a judicial officer. Explore how the Mentee's unique interests, history, and talents influence their perspective and how that perspective will shape their role on the bench: • What are your values and how do they fit with your choice to become a judge? How are they expressed in your current practice — and how will they be expressed from the bench? • Do you have a spiritual context — a religion, relationship with nature, or guiding philosophy? How does it shape why and how you practice, and how will it ground you in the judicial role? • What are your hobbies and how do they connect with your professional life? How will they serve you as a judge, where the role imposes more constraints on outside engagement? • What talents express the most essential parts of your personal identity? Do you feel you are fully expressing all dimensions of your perspective and experience? • What are the key relationships in your life? How will they be affected by the judicial role — the public scrutiny, the constraints on socializing with attorneys, the emotional weight of the work? • What would your ideal integration of personal and judicial life look like? • How does your history shape why you became a lawyer and why you now aspire to the bench? • How do your hopes and dreams for the future affect your professional decisions and your pursuit of this pathway? • At the end of your career on the bench, what would you like to have accomplished? What kind of judge do you want to be remembered as? • Do an activity related to the Mentee's personal interests to build the mentoring relationship outside a formal legal context.	☐
Discuss the unique whole-person dimensions of judicial service: • How the judicial role is both deeply fulfilling and uniquely isolating — and what Mentee will do to maintain connection and joy. • How the constraints of judicial ethics (no political activity, limited public comment, restrictions on socializing with attorneys) will require Mentee to find new outlets for personal expression and community engagement. • How to sustain curiosity, creativity, and personal growth within the structure of the judicial role. • How Mentee's personal history — including experiences of injustice, community service, and advocacy — will inform the kind of judge they become.	☐

Action	Mark Completed
Discuss the legacy Mentee hopes to build through judicial service: • What systemic changes or improvements would Mentee most like to influence as a judge? • How does Mentee’s identity, background, and community connection make them uniquely positioned to contribute to justice in Colorado? • What would Mentee want attorneys, litigants, and court staff to say about their courtroom twenty years from now? • How will Mentee model well-being, fairness, and humanity on the bench in a way that ripples outward to court culture and the legal profession?	☐

This mentoring plan is a living document. Pairs are encouraged to revisit goals, adjust activities to fit emerging needs, and document their progress throughout the mentoring term. For questions, modifications, or program support, contact the Colorado Attorney Mentoring Program (CAMP).