



COSCA

Conference of State Court Administrators

NEW MEMBER GUIDE

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FOREWORD

Welcome to COSCA!

On behalf of the Conference of State Court Administrators (COSCA) and specifically the COSCA Services to Members Committee, we extend a warm welcome to you. We will be reaching out to you to offer our support.

Upon your appointment as State Court Administrator, you are automatically a member of COSCA – one of only fifty-six state court and territory leaders. The COSCA Services to Members Committee schedules an annual orientation during the mid-year conference, offers webinars and forums for new members, and provides ongoing assistance through an active mentor program. We also plan to provide optional executive coaching to assist you with your transition to this critical position.

We recently updated the COSCA Guide for New Members for your reference and background. This guide was developed to help new members understand what COSCA it is about, how operates, and its relationship to the Conference of Chief Justices (CCJ) and the National Center for State Courts (NCSC). This resource was initially created by J.D. Gingerich, a long-time State Court Administrator in Arkansas who served as COSCA's President. We want to acknowledge his contributions to COSCA through his service and development of the initial guide.

Again, I welcome you to COSCA and believe you will find this to be an excellent reference guide about our organization.

Karl R. Hade, VA

President, COSCA

Chair, COSCA Services to Members Committee

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COSCA STRUCTURE AND OPERATION

■ Membership

You are automatically a member of the Conference of State Court Administrators (COSCA) upon your appointment as the State Court Administrator – there is no application, no membership fee, and no vote for approval. There are only fifty-six members – which includes all states and territories – so your active participation is both valued and needed.

■ Upon Your Appointment

Upon your appointment, you will be contacted by the National Center for State Courts (NCSC) to welcome you to COSCA. You will be sent both digital and paper resources and materials to help you in your transition. You will be invited to attend a New Member Orientation, forums, and other opportunities to meet COSCA members, to ask questions, and to learn from other COSCA members. COSCA has also established a mentor program for new members.

■ Meetings

There are two meetings of the COSCA membership each year. The Annual Meeting is coordinated jointly with the meeting of the Conference of Chief Justices (CCJ). It takes place in late July or early August at various locations across the United States. Location and dates are usually set two to three years in advance. The host state works with the NCSC and a joint planning committee of CCJ and COSCA to plan educational sessions, which are always excellent. CCJ and COSCA meet together for all sessions. The schedule includes time for each of the Board of Directors to meet and may include time for Conference committees to meet.

There is usually an impressive social program with planned activities which allow participants to see and experience the history and culture of the meeting site. A separate program for spouses and children is also available. As a result, many members bring along their families for the Annual Meeting. There is a registration fee for the meeting which is collected by the NCSC and typically covers the cost of most official activities and provided meals. There is a separate, very reasonable registration fee for spouses, guests, and children. Member states are responsible for the payment of their own travel, lodging, and related expenses.

The Mid-Year Meeting is held in December each year (most often the first week) and is usually in a location with a warmer climate. You will likely hear reference to the unofficial COSCA “palm tree” rule which limits the December meeting to those locations which can produce a palm tree. CCJ and COSCA meet separately for this meeting (the CCJ

Mid-Year meeting is in January or February), so it tends to be smaller and more informal than the Annual Meeting. The educational sessions more often include core court administration topics, and COSCA members are often included in the presentations. There is also time scheduled for some meetings of committees and opportunities for the COSCA regions to meet and the Board of Directors. There are no set social activities or programs for spouses or children. There is a small registration fee collected by the NCSC, and member states must pay their own travel, lodging, and related expenses.

During the Annual Meeting and the Mid-Year Meeting, the official Business Meeting of the membership takes place. The meeting room is set with table placards and a seat for each state and territory represented in the Conference. Each member is authorized to speak and vote on all issues. The agenda is usually long and includes reports and recommendations from committees, proposed resolutions, and other action items.

The meeting is chaired by the COSCA President. It is primarily during these two meetings each year that the official business of the Conference is conducted, and official action is taken. Members who are unable to attend a meeting may designate in writing a substitute to attend and vote in place of the member. Voting by proxy is not authorized.

Informal settings provide an excellent opportunity for you to visit with COSCA and CCJ colleagues, NCSC staff, and other guests of the Conference. It is often just as educational as the education program. It is a great venue for new members to create connections with other members of COSCA.

Much of the substantive work of COSCA is accomplished through the activities of its committees. Because we are a small organization with few members, there is a very real need for active participation by as many members as are willing and able to serve. Work on one or more committees is an excellent way to become engaged in the work of COSCA, to have an opportunity to meet and work with other members, and to share knowledge, skills, and abilities and to provide leadership on a wide array of issues.

■ How to Become a Committee Member

For almost all committees, the membership changes annually with the appointments prepared prior to the Annual Meeting and recommended by the COSCA President-Elect. The President-Elect's proposals are ratified by the Board of Directors during the Annual Meeting, take effect at the end of the meeting, and expire at the end of the following year's Annual Meeting. In order to assist the President-Elect with the appointment decisions, written communication is sent to all COSCA members in the spring each year asking members to submit their preferences for committee service.

The President-Elect uses this information to guide his or her appointments. The President-Elect also designates the Chair of each committee. Members should feel free to contact the President-Elect and convey additional information about their preferences

and willingness to serve. Because the COSCA Bylaws grant broad authority to the President-Elect in making committee appointments, there could theoretically be great change in committee memberships from year to year. In practice, there is generally much stability, with a recognition that most committee work extends beyond the time limits of a single term of office. New members can ask to be added to Committee Rosters at the time of their appointment or following.

■ Committee Types

According to the COSCA Bylaws, we have “standing committees,” “other committees,” and “joint committees.” Both “standing” and “other” committees are made up of COSCA members only. Most are organized around a legal or court management issue, although there are a few which are focused on the inner workings of COSCA, such as Nominating, Service to Members, and Education. “Joint Committees” have an equal number of members appointed from both COSCA and CCJ and are co-chaired by one member of each Conference. The President-Elects of COSCA and CCJ select the members to represent their Conference.

■ Committee Meetings

Time for meetings of all committees is scheduled at the Annual and Mid-Year meetings of COSCA and CCJ. Because the Annual Meeting is the only opportunity for both Conferences to be together, this is the only time face-to-face meetings of all members of a Joint Committee can occur. Meetings of Joint Committees are often scheduled during the Mid-Year meetings of CCJ and COSCA, but only include that Conference’s representatives. Since the pandemic, Committees are often meeting virtually. This change in practice allows more time at the conferences for educational sessions. Any action taken during the Mid-Year meeting of Joint Committees is ratified by action of the full committee during the Annual Meeting or in an interim virtual meeting.

All COSCA committee meetings are open, allowing any Conference members to attend. Especially for newer members, taking the time to sit in on several committees provides an excellent opportunity to observe firsthand the topics and activities addressed by the various committees. Such attendance provides great information about current issues in the courts and also helps in deciding the best place to focus one’s COSCA participation in the future.

Each COSCA committee is staffed by one or more members of the NCSC. The names of designated staff are shown on the official list of CCJ and COSCA Committees. These staff members are great sources of information pertaining to the work of the committees and can answer any questions you might have about those committees and their activities.

■ Officers and Board of Directors

The COSCA leadership structure consists of four officers (President, President-Elect, Vice-President, and Past President) and six at-large Directors who serve for a three-year term. All positions are elected by the membership at the Annual Meeting, based upon a recommendation from the Nominating Committee. Each year there is an opening in at least two of the six Board of Director's positions and the Vice-President's position. (The Bylaws provide that once elected, the Vice President automatically becomes the President-Elect the next year and then serves as President the following year.) Any COSCA member is eligible for election to the Board. A minimum of one year's service on the Board is required to be considered as Vice-President.

Each fall the Nominating Committee will seek nominations from all members for service on the Board or as Vice-President.

You are welcome to nominate yourself and/or a colleague. The committee is charged with ensuring that we have racial, gender, and geographical balance among the Board and officers. While seniority plays a part, it is not determinative. The committee members usually look for members who have expressed an interest and willingness to serve and who have also demonstrated that interest by their past service and leadership with COSCA committees or other work within COSCA.

The Nominating Committee meets at the Mid-Year meeting and votes on a slate of officers which will be presented for election at the following Annual Meeting. Members who are elected at the Annual Meeting begin their service immediately upon the close of the meeting.

Service on the Board of Directors usually requires two additional meetings per year in addition to the Mid-Year and Annual Meeting, as well as one or more virtual meetings or conference calls. Expenses for attendance and participation in these additional meetings are paid by the NCSC.

■ The History of COSCA

COSCA members can take pride in the fact that we share a connection with an organization that was at the beginning and the very center of the development of the profession of court administration in the United States. Some of that history is captured in a publication which was produced with the assistance of COSCA, and which is worth reviewing at some point. Theodore J. Fetter, a former COSCA member, is the author of *A History of the Conference of State Court Administrators, 1955-2005*. It can be accessed via the [COSCA website](#).

■ COSCA Services to Members Committee

The COSCA Services to Members Committee has as one of its primary purposes the support of new members of the organization. Several programs and activities are used to help new State Court Administrators with their new responsibilities and to connect with their new COSCA colleagues. New COSCA members should feel free to contact the members of this committee with questions, concerns, or requests for assistance and information.

COSCA New Member Orientations are held in advance of the Midyear meeting, and a special breakfast is held at the Annual meeting to which all new members of COSCA and CCJ are invited and recognized. During the COSCA Business Meeting at the Annual and Mid-Year meeting, first-time attendees are introduced and recognized.

This Committee offers a mentor program. New members are contacted soon after their appointment and offered the opportunity to be paired with another member, usually from a nearby state or a state of a similar size or court structure as that of the new member. The mentor simply commits to be available to welcome or initiate contact by the new member, respond to questions or to offer other assistance as requested by the new member.

In recent years the NCSC has reinstated a previous practice of inviting new members of CCJ and COSCA to an orientation session at the NCSC headquarters in Williamsburg, Virginia. This can be a great opportunity to receive helpful information about the NCSC, the services it can provide to you and your state, and to meet members of the NCSC with whom you will work in the years to come. If you are invited, you should accept.

■ Conference of Chief Justices

Since the creation of COSCA's predecessor, the National Conference of Court Administrative Officers, the organization of State Court Administrators has been tied to the Conference of Chief Justices. The membership of CCJ is similar to that of COSCA in that it includes the Chief Justice of each of the U.S. states and territories. CCJ is led by a President, other officers, and a Board of Directors.

From the beginning, meetings of COSCA have been held in conjunction with the meetings of CCJ. The two organizations have joined for educational sessions and have worked in concert in the development of policy positions and other engagement in issues of importance to state courts and the state judicial branch.

In many ways, the national organization, structure, and activities of CCJ and COSCA replicate the relationship between the roles of each Chief Justice and State Court Administrator. The opportunity for COSCA members to work closely and directly with the nation's chief justices is a great benefit of active participation in the organization. New COSCA members should visit with their chiefs about participation in CCJ and COSCA.

Active representation and participation in CCJ and COSCA by each state provides benefits and is a great source of helpful information for the state, enriches the professional lives of the Chief Justice and State Court Administrator, and strengthens and enables the working relationship between a state's chief and administrator to lead and serve the state judicial branch more effectively.

ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND

■ Policy Papers

One of the most engaging activities of COSCA during the last several years has been the selection, drafting, debating, and adoption of a paper on a topic of particular importance to state courts. The process started during the preparation for our 1999 Annual Meeting. The idea at the time, under the guidance of then COSCA President Bill Vickery (CA), was to use the drafting of a "thought piece" as a way to generate discussion about an important policy topic as a means to enhance our educational program. The focus was not on the written paper but rather on the debate and discussion which occurred as a result of the paper. Over time, the process has matured and, while the policy paper and its discussion are an important part of our educational program, much more emphasis is placed upon the paper itself and the policy recommendations that are contained therein.

The consideration and adoption of COSCA policy papers has fundamentally changed our organization. Our new relationships with many other organizations, both governmental and private, have been a result of the policy positions taken in our papers. Whereas our main focus in earlier years was on education and networking, we are now much involved in the process of providing national leadership on policy issues important to the field of court administration and the national court community.

The drafting of the paper is hard work and requires considerable time. COSCA members who have experience or expertise with the topic and, more importantly, a willingness to devote the time to the effort take the lead. New members often become involved, take a leadership role, and provided lasting service to COSCA through their work with the policy papers. All volunteers are welcome!

■ NCSC Website

The NCSC Website can be found at www.ncsc.org. Like most successful organizations, the NCSC utilizes the website as the primary vehicle for communication and information sharing with constituents and the public. Research materials and publications, biographical and contact information for NCSC staff members, dates and registration

information for meetings and conferences, information, and updates on a plethora of NCSC projects and programs – all can be accessed via the website.

There is a separate website for COSCA which can be accessed through the NCSC website. A membership list, current committee list, and copies of policy papers are among materials available on the COSCA website. You can reach it directly at <http://cosca.ncsc.org>.

■ Judicial Salary

NCSC provides resources to maintain comparative data and information about judicial salaries. Where a state is listed among comparative rankings and how data is analyzed and displayed can either assist or detract from local efforts to improve judicial compensation – so the compilation and reporting of the data can be a sensitive issue for COSCA members. The NCSC maintains state judicial salary information on the NCSC website as the [Judicial Salary Tracker](#). Each COSCA member is authorized on behalf of each state and territory and is requested to ensure that the information from his or her state is correct and up to date.

■ State Court Organization

One very common and often repeated experience of all State Court Administrators is to be asked by local judges, legislators, the press, or others about how a particular issue is handled in other states. “How do you structure your jurisdiction courts?” “Do your judges have law clerks?” “Who submits the court’s budget?” “Have you implemented e-filing?” Etc., etc., etc.

State Court Organizational information resides on the [NCSC website](#) and is available for real-time revision by each COSCA member. It is a treasure trove of comparative information about aspects of state courts. For a new COSCA member, it is an essential resource. If there is information in need of revision, contact the appropriate NCSC staff and they will work with you to update the content.

■ Rehnquist Award Dinner

In November of each year, the NCSC hosts a dinner in the Grand Hall of the U.S. Supreme Court at which the Chief Justice of the United States presents the annual [Rehnquist Award for Judicial Excellence](#). The award honors a state trial court or appellate judge who has been nominated by their state and selected by an NCSC selection committee.

All members of COSCA and CCJ receive an invitation to the event. It is usually oversubscribed so members need to reply in a timely manner to be included. All costs for attendance must be borne by each state. The event is usually held in conjunction with meetings of the COSCA and CCJ Board of Directors and other meetings arranged by the NCSC.

The grand and historic setting and the distinguished nature of the crowd make for an event that every COSCA member should attend at least once. All members are also encouraged to consider nominating judges from their states for the Rehnquist Award. It is a great way to recognize the service of an outstanding member of your state judiciary who would otherwise go unnoticed on a national level.

■ Special Awards

The NCSC and COSCA regularly honor members and others with special awards. As a COSCA member you will receive requests to submit nominations. The Rehnquist Award is awarded annually at the Rehnquist Dinner in Washington, D.C. Three other awards should be highlighted because COSCA members are often recipients of the awards. Beginning in 1974, the NCSC has awarded the [Warren E. Burger Award for Excellence in Court Administration](#). This prestigious award is given annually and recognizes a state court system official who has “made a significant contribution to the field of court administration.” Several current or former COSCA members have been recipients. The selection is made by a committee of the NCSC Board of Directors.

In 2001 the [Ken Palmer Award](#) was created by COSCA to honor Ken Palmer, a former member who was very active in COSCA and who died at a much too early age while serving as AOC Director in Florida. The award is presented to current or former members of COSCA who have demonstrated extraordinary leadership and excellence in judicial administration. Nominations are solicited bi-annually, and the selection is made by a committee of COSCA members.

In 2015, the Conference of Chief Justices, the Conference of State Court Administrators, the National Association for Court Management and the National Association for Presiding Judges and Court Executive Officers jointly created the [Mary C. McQueen Award for Excellence and Leadership in Justice System Improvement](#).

■ Other Court and Court-related Organizations

There is a myriad of other national organizations with which a new State Court Administrator will interact or about which you will hear through participation in COSCA. A list of those groups and relationship to COSCA is included as an attachment or appendix to this Guide.

■ COSCA Liaisons to Other National Organizations

With so many court or court-related organizations with which COSCA has a direct or indirect relationship, many steps are taken by COSCA to maintain and foster communication and interaction. This effort includes outreach to organizations representing the other branches of state governments, including the National Governors Association, the National Conference of State Legislatures, and the

Council of State Governments. One method is through the extension of invitations to those organizations to send a representative to attend the Mid-Year or Annual Meetings of COSCA. Often those organizations reciprocate and invite COSCA to send representatives to their meetings.

■ COSCA Listservs

Over time, COSCA has established many email listservs for its members. The primary listserv for COSCA members only requires approval by the COSCA President in order to post. This is accomplished by the NCSC Association Manager.

Other listservs of interest include representatives from the Administrative Offices of the Courts, as designated by the State Court Administrator. Annually, these listservs are sent to each COSCA member for updating and review.

■ Newsletters

NCSC publishes many newsletters including its flagship **@ The Center**, which describes major projects, publications, and conferences of interest. Each COSCA member is encouraged to review the list of all available [NCSC newsletters](#).



CONCLUSION

■ In Closing

COSCA membership has the potential to provide you with information and a network of resources otherwise unavailable, all of which will allow you to do your job better in your home state. Participation in COSCA provides exciting opportunities to be involved and engaged at a national and international level with a myriad of issues involving court administration and the role and operation of the judicial branch. As a result of your regular attendance and participation in COSCA activities, you will create new bonds – professional relationships and personal friendships with colleagues from across the country, all engaged in a common mission.

Every new member of COSCA arrives with a unique background and set of skills and experiences. Our membership is as diverse as our state court structures and modes of doing business. For the organization to reach its potential, the unique perspective of all members is required.

Congratulations on your appointment. Welcome to COSCA.



APPENDIX

Court-related Organizations of Interest

The following is an alphabetical list of some of the court and court-related organizations and their relationship to COSCA.

American Judges Association (AJA)

The AJA is a membership organization, most of the membership of which consists of general and limited jurisdiction judges. They have semi-annual education conferences. Their staffing is provided by the NCSC.

Conference of Court Public Information Officers (CCPIO)

Like NASJE, the CCPIO is not a COSCA created entity, but many of its members are employed as public information officers in state administrative offices. Other members are employed directly by the Supreme Court or are employed and working at the trial court level. The CCPIO hosts an annual conference and is staffed by the NCSC.

Council of Chief Judges of the State Courts of Appeal (CCJSCA)

The CCJSCA is composed of the chief judges from each state's courts of appeal. Staffing for the organization is provided by the NCSC. They have an annual education conference. There is a dues structure for the organization somewhat similar to the formula for state assessments.

Council of Language Access Coordinators (CLAC)

CLAC was created pursuant to a resolution adopted by COSCA to provide a structure for meetings of the court interpreter directors of each state. Meetings of the officers had taken place previously within a different framework, but with little interaction with COSCA. COSCA and CCJ adopted a new funding formula for state payments to the NCSC to support language access services and created a new framework for the organization. There is also a Language Access Advisory Committee (LAAC), composed primarily of members of COSCA, which provides leadership for issues involving court interpreters.

Court Information Technology Officers Consortium (CITOC)

CITOC was created as a result of a joint resolution adopted by COSCA and NACM to provide a structure for education and collaboration of court technology directors. Because these officials are employed at both the state and local levels, a joint effort between COSCA and NACM was prompted. Membership in CITOC for court technology officers who work in state administrative offices requires the approval of the State Court Administrator. The organization has an annual meeting, an active listserv, and is staffed by the NCSC.

Judicial Family Institute (JFI)

Your interaction with JFI will likely occur during the Annual Meeting of CCJ/COSCA. The group was originally composed of spouses of chief justices who were present at the annual meeting and who began to meet for education or to discuss potential projects. In recent years JFI has sponsored a Law and Literature session at the beginning of each Annual Meeting. Staffing is provided by the NCSC.

The National Association for Court Management (NACM)

NACM is the country's largest association of court administrators, many of whom serve at the trial court level. Many COSCA members are also members of NACM and, in recent years, NACM has recruited judges as members. At least one member of the NCSC Board of Directors is a NACM representative. The NACM President is invited to attend the Annual and Midyear COSCA meetings and COSCA members are actively encouraged to consider membership in NACM.

National Association of State Judicial Educators (NASJE)

NASJE is one of several national organizations which is not an entity of COSCA but the membership of which is primarily composed of employees of state administrative offices of the courts. In addition to AOC judicial educators, NASJE membership includes national and state judicial education providers and colleges and universities that are involved in providing judicial branch education. They conduct an annual meeting with educational sessions and are provided staffing by the NCSC.

National Association of Women Judges (NAWJ)

The NAWJ is an affiliate association to and staffed by the NCSC. Its membership is open to all judges and its focus is judicial education and increasing the number and advancement of women judges at all levels.

National College of Probate Judges (NCPJ)

Because of the variety across the country in the way probate matters are handled, the NCPJ represents a mix of general and limited jurisdiction judges, both lawyers and non-lawyers, who preside over probate matters. The College provides education through an annual meeting, and the organization is staffed by the NCSC.

National Conference of Appellate Court Clerks (NCACC)

The membership of the NCACC is composed of the chief clerks of state appellate courts. They conduct an annual meeting with educational sessions and are provided staffing by the NCSC.

National Consortium on Racial and Ethnic Fairness in the Courts (NCREFC)

The NCREFC is an organization which grew out of gatherings of the leaders of state racial and ethnic commissions or committees which had been created by supreme

courts or state bar associations. It is not really a membership organization but rather provides a structure for information sharing and for the hosting of an annual meeting. Staffing is provided by the NCSC.

National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ)

The NCJFCJ is a separate non-profit with no direct connection with the NCSC or its affiliate organizations. It is supported by a large professional staff and headquartered in Reno, Nevada. Its primary membership is composed of trial court judges who work in the juvenile and family court division. The Council provides education and research through national and regional conferences and in partnership with state judicial education programs. It often has funding which can be made available to assist your judges in attending Council meetings or to offset the cost of bringing presenters to your state.

National Judicial College (NJC)

The NJC is located in Reno, Nevada, and is affiliated with the University of Nevada at Reno. The College provides judicial education courses for general and limited jurisdiction judges on its campus in Reno. The NJC will also contract to bring its courses to individual states. The Dean of the NJC usually attends the COSCA Mid-Year and Annual meetings.

State Justice Institute (SJI)

SJI is a creation of Congress which is led by a Board of Directors appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate. Included on the Board are representatives from CCJ and COSCA. When vacancies occur, CCJ and/or COSCA provide the President with a recommendation of three potential nominees from which to choose. SJI receives an annual appropriation from Congress for the purpose of making grants directly to state courts or to organizations which support state courts or are involved with issues that affect state courts. The Executive Director of SJI usually attends the Mid-Year and Annual meetings of COSCA.

NOTE: COSCA Committee Descriptions TBA.