

Judicial Candidate Evaluation Committee Guidelines

These guidelines are intended to promote consistency and fairness in the evaluation of judicial candidates by panels of the Detroit Bar Association (“Association” or “DBA”) Judicial Candidate Evaluation Committee (“JCEC” or the “Committee”). They are not intended to constrain panel discretion or flexibility, but to provide structure and clarity in the evaluation process.

1. Timeline

- The Association President shall appoint the chair(s) of the Committee before **September 1** of the odd numbered year prior to the election cycle.
- The chair(s) along with the Association Executive Director and Association President shall appoint the members of the Committee on or before **December 31** of the odd numbered year prior to the election cycle.
- The chair(s) shall schedule the first Committee Meeting no later than **March 1** of the election year.
- The press release outlining the ratings shall be published before the **August Primary**.

2. Panel Structure and Roles

- The **Panel Chair** is responsible for facilitating the interview, moderating discussion, and preparing the rating recommendation form following deliberations.
- The Chair should appoint a **Panel Reporter** to take notes during the interview and deliberations. These notes should include key observations, strengths, concerns, and other impressions relevant to the candidate’s evaluation.

2. Objectivity and Evaluation Criteria

- Panels must evaluate candidates **objectively**, based solely on the criteria identified in the official JCEC rating form. Ratings should reflect the candidate’s qualifications, temperament, integrity, legal knowledge, and commitment to fairness and justice.
- **Numerical ratings** are not required. Ratings should align with qualitative categories (e.g., *Outstanding*, *Well-Qualified*, *Qualified*, *Not Qualified*). Reasonable differences of opinion are expected.
- A “**Not Qualified**” rating must be supported by specific and clearly articulated reasons, documented in the panel’s recommendation.

3. Conflicts of Interest

- Any panel member with a **personal or professional conflict** regarding a candidate must recuse themselves from the interview and deliberation. That member should physically leave the interview room to avoid any appearance of impropriety.
- A recused panel member may, if appropriate, provide **factual information** about the candidate to the Panel Chair or full JCEC prior to the interview.

4. Candidate Communication

- Candidates should be clearly advised at the outset that the panel's role is **advisory**. The panel makes a recommendation to the full JCEC, which may consider additional information and may ultimately assign a different rating.
- Each candidate should be allowed up to **five (5) minutes** at the beginning of the interview for an **opening statement** or presentation.

5. Conduct and Professionalism

- Panel members must always treat candidates with courtesy and professionalism, regardless of the candidate's demeanor.
- Panels are encouraged to ask **probing, substantive questions** based on the candidate's qualifications and any relevant factual information but must maintain a respectful and impartial tone throughout.

6. Suggested Interview Questions

The following are suggested questions and are not mandatory. Panels should tailor their questions to each candidate's background and the position being sought.

For All Candidates:

- What are the highlights of your legal and professional career?
- How often do you appear in court, and in what capacity?
- What special qualifications or experiences make you particularly suited for judicial service?
- Why are you seeking a judicial position?
- What reforms or improvements would you propose within the judicial system?
- Have you received evaluations or ratings from other bar associations or organizations?

For Incumbent Judges:

- Can you provide examples of your approach to:
 - Sentencing practices?
 - Courtroom management and docket control?
 - Judicial administration or innovation?