



Alberta Court of Justice

Professional Development for Justices & Justices of the Peace

The Alberta Court of Justice places strong emphasis on judicial education, underscoring its commitment to ensuring that Justices and Justices of the Peace are well-prepared to serve in a dynamic legal and social environment.

Since its inception in 1956, the Alberta Provincial Justices' Association (APJA) has supported Justices in fulfilling their individual responsibility for professional development by organizing semi-annual education conferences. The Canadian Association of Provincial Court Judges (CAPCJ) has hosted annual conferences since 1973 and introduced a Newly Appointed Judges Program in 1976. In 1988, the National Judicial Institute (NJI) began offering educational opportunities to Justices of the Alberta Court of Justice.

For more than 15 years, Justices in the Alberta Court of Justice have also received a Professional Development Allowance to fund their individual educational activities, including conference attendance and the purchase of books and reference materials. Likewise, the Society of Justices of the Peace for Alberta (SJPA) plays an important role in supporting Justices of the Peace, who have had access to a Professional Development Allowance since 2012.

Mentorship and shadowing of senior Justices and Justices of the Peace have always been integral to the professional development of newly appointed members of the judiciary. In addition, they receive research support through legal counsel and law librarians.

Judicial education is a key strategic priority outlined in the Court's [Strategic Plan](#). The Office of the Chief Justice supplements existing educational programs and continues to expand the range of opportunities available to its Justices and Justices of the Peace. The following components form the foundation of the Court's Professional Development Program.

Court Education Committee & Judicial Education Manager

The Education Committee of the Alberta Court of Justice, established in 2014, is composed of the Deputy Chief Justice, Assistant Chief Justices, legal counsel, members of the APJA Education Committee, members of the SJPA Education Committee, and other members of the judiciary from across the province. The Committee's mandate is to support, improve, and enhance the professional competence of the Court's Justices and Justices of the Peace.

In the same year, the Court created the position of Judicial Education Manager to assist Justices and Justices of the Peace in assessing their educational needs and identifying appropriate resources. The Judicial Education Manager also provides support to the Education Committee and other Court committees that address educational matters.

The Court's Education Committee collaborates closely with the APJA Education Committee and the SJPA Education Committee to identify goals, topics, and resources for planning and delivering education programs for the Court.

Education Plans

Three-Year Education Plan

The [Judicial Education Plan](#) identifies four core areas of judicial education: Substantive Law, Judicial Skills, Social Context, and Judicial Development. It formalizes expectations and resources for Justices and Justices of the Peace, assisting them to setting learning goals and selecting appropriate programs annually. The Education Plan is reviewed and updated each year to ensure relevance and alignment with evolving judicial needs.

Education Plans for Newly Appointed Justices & Justices of the Peace

The Education Plans for [Newly Appointed Justices](#) and [Newly Appointed Justices of the Peace](#) outline a range of programs and resources designed to support learning and professional development during the early years of appointment:

- ***Shadowing Program***

New appointees have the opportunity to accompany senior colleagues to observe their work. The program is tailored to the experience and background of each new appointee, and a comprehensive list of proceedings to be shadowed is included in the Plans.

- ***Mentoring Program***

Provides a confidential forum for discussion, advice and collegiality. A checklist helps guide conversations to ensure all aspects of the teaching-learning relationship are addressed.

- ***Information Management Sessions***

Offered shortly after appointment, these sessions cover topics such as privacy and access, library resources, security protocols, and computer assistance.

- ***Individual Education Plans***

Developed for the first five years of tenure, these plans include targeted learning opportunities. For Justices, this may include an evidence seminar and sessions on Indigenous justice and sexual

offences law, as appropriate. The cost of attending an evidence course is covered by the Office of the Chief Justice and does not count against a Justice's annual education leave allowance.

- ***Judging in Your First Three Years (JYFTY) and Boot Camps***

New appointees can take part in a one-day virtual JYFTY session and two half-day Boot Camp sessions annually during their first three years. Organized by the Court's Education Committee, these programs feature sessions on Indigenous justice, sexual assault trials, credibility and other substantive law topics, evidence, cultural dimensions of judging, court management, and judicial ethics. They provide valuable opportunities for newer appointments to learn from senior members of the Court and focus on the Alberta context.

- ***National & Provincial Programs***

Newly appointed Justices are invited to attend the New Judges' Education Program, offered annually by the CAPCJ, and the Newly Appointed Provincial and Territorial Judges Skills Seminar, organized by NJI. The CAPCJ program focuses on substantive law, while the NJI program focuses on judicial skills. The cost of attending these programs is covered by the Office of the Chief Justice and does not count against a Justice's annual education leave allowance.

In-House Education Programs

Justices and Justices of the Peace have access to the following in-house programs:

- ***Semi-Annual APJA/SIPA Conferences***

Attended by all Justices and Justices of the Peace, these conferences cover topics determined by their respective associations. Past topics have included Indigenous justice, sexual assault, mental health and addiction challenges for litigants, sentencing, judicial wellness, and cultural competency.

- ***Annual JYFTY Program and Boot Camps***

Designed for newly appointed Justices and Justices of the Peace to support early career development.

- ***Lunch and Learn Sessions***

Held throughout the year, either in person or online. These sessions are accessible to Justices and Justices of the Peace across the province, ensuring board participation.

- ***In-House Seminars***

Organized by the Court's Education Committee on areas of interest such as judgment writing, Judicial Dispute Resolution, bail, and warrants.

External Education Programs

Provincial and territorial courts across Canada partner closely with NJI to deliver educational programs, both in person and online. Since NJI's inception, the Government of Alberta has provided an annual grant to support these programs and the participation of the Alberta Court of Justice's judiciary. NJI publishes an annual schedule of judicial education programs for all provincial court judges across Canada, covering three core components: substantive law, skills training, and social context. Justices of the Alberta Court of Justice also have ongoing access to the NJI website, which offers a wealth of educational resources.

All Justices and Justices of the Peace may participate in programs offered by the Federation of Law Societies, including the National Criminal Law Program and the National Family Law Program. Many are also members of the Canadian Bar Association (CBA) and can attend CBA programs. Additionally, programs organized by the Legal Education Society of Alberta (LESA) are available for Justices and Justices of the Peace.

Justices may attend the annual meetings and educational sessions of the CAPCJ, where Alberta Justices have long been active participants in educational programs and governance. Furthermore, Justices can take part in programs and seminars offered by the Canadian Institute for the Administration of Justice (CIAJ).

Educational Resources

Justices and Justices of the Peace have access to a wide range of resources to support ongoing professional development.

- ***Judicial Education SharePoint Site***

Provides in-house materials, including Bench Books for Criminal, Family, Child Protection, Civil matters, and for Justices of the Peace. It also features a quarterly Education Newsletter, materials and video recordings of in-house programs, and a regularly updated inventory of upcoming learning opportunities.

- ***Educational Updates***

Shared regularly through announcements of programs, law blogs, newsletters, and other resources via the Education Newsletter, email, and SharePoint. Summaries of new federal legislation impacting the Court are also provided by CAPCJ.

- ***Library Research and Tools***

Justices and Justices of the Peace have access to library assistance and legal research databases, including Lexis+, Westlaw, and vLex Justis, ensuring comprehensive support for legal research and case preparation.

- ***National Judicial Institute (NJI) Resources***

The NJI website offers extensive resources, including papers from past judicial seminars, NJI Bench Books, education programs, newsletters, subject collections, and multimedia resources such as webinars, podcasts, and videos.

Professional Allowance and Education Leave

All Justices and Justices of the Peace receive an annual Professional Development Allowance that can be used to attend educational courses or purchase reference materials and textbooks.

Funding for APJA/SJPA conferences, programs for newly appointed Justices and Justices of the Peace, in-house programs, and specific individual education initiatives is provided through Court budget allocations and grant funding from the Ministry of Justice.

Full-time Justices and both full-time and part-time Justices of the Peace are allocated 10 days of education leave annually, and part-time Justices receive 5 days. This leave is primarily used to attend the semi-annual conferences but may also be applied to other educational opportunities as approved by the Office of the Chief Justice. Additional leave is available for Justices involved in the French Program, those engaged in teaching, or in response to specific requests.