



## **CCJ/COSCA COURT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE**

# **RECRUITMENT, SELECTION, and RETENTION OF IT STAFF**

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## Table of Contents

Introduction .....	1
Factors to Consider in Recruiting and Selection of IT Staff	
Analyzing Reasons for Turnover.....	2
The IT Organizational Culture .....	2
Reviewing the Right Work Location & Teleworking Flexibility .....	3
Determining Whether a Position Can Be Remote, on Premise, or Hybrid .....	4
Determining and Improving the Court Environment .....	4
Hiring Versus Outsourcing .....	6
Direct Hire Versus Hiring a Contractor.....	7
Developing and Implementing Your Search Strategy .....	8
Considerations for Posting Technical Court Positions .....	9
The Right Candidate .....	9
Salary Considerations.....	10
Equipment Considerations.....	10
Screening and Evaluating Your Candidates.....	11
Phone and Video Interview and Prescreening .....	12
Importance of Hiring Agility .....	12
Handling Transitions .....	12
Developing an Onboarding Plan and Strategies .....	12
Retention Strategy.....	13
Succession Planning .....	14

## Introduction

Recruitment of information technology (IT) staff remains a challenge for courts and related agencies. The salary levels and benefits that are offered rarely compete with the private sector. Often, the IT department is short-staffed, and hours can be long and hectic. Some staff may view a court IT position as a steppingstone to a better paying job, so retention becomes a challenge. Efforts concentrating on increasing salaries alone are insufficient, and other job characteristics are equally or more important in the retention of IT staff.

Retention in such situations can frequently become a matter of personal engagement. Providing opportunities to fulfill an individual's motivations and desires can serve as the critical fulcrum in ensuring that the needed employee sees continuing employment as being valuable, respected, and rewarding. Successful retention strategies include providing a work environment of greater autonomy with the allowance to make decisions about work that is meaningful, challenging, and interesting, and the opportunity to apply new technology.

In the current climate, IT positions have become even more specialized. The days of one person being able to manage servers, databases and desktops are long gone. And with the pandemic, more staff are working from home, presenting different challenges, such as the widespread use of remote desktop connections, and use of WebEx, Zoom and other such applications that require different support models. In some cases, there has been a proliferation of technology and a struggle to remotely support it.

In many court settings, consideration is being given to outsourcing IT services and to deciding how much in-house staff is needed. Many courts have turned to city, county, or state resources and/or third-party vendors.

Often court personnel do not understand the IT role and see it as an impediment to accomplishing the court's business. IT staff may lack practical understanding of the court's business operations. Progressive leaders will take a service-oriented approach to IT management, but inadequate staffing and limited attention to internal customer service can make the service desk a focus of frustration for many end-users.

IT staff called on to support too many court staff or to be technically proficient in too many different technologies can become understandably frustrated, leading to job dissatisfaction and high turnover. Allocating adequate resources is essential to IT delivering effectively on the court's objectives. Managing both court and IT staff expectations is essential and requires effective communication.

How then is a court to maintain and improve its technology position in such an environment? Can court leaders take actions that might alleviate the challenges? This paper will discuss many of the challenges and best practices for recruiting, selecting, and retaining court IT staff. It will also highlight the need to train staff so that their skills do not become outdated.

## Factors to Consider in Recruiting and Selection of IT Staff

### Analyzing Reasons for Turnover

Court leaders should regularly review turnover in IT positions. When the IT organization experiences high turnover rates generally or in certain positions, it can be disruptive to operations and staff members. In addition, the re-training needed to understand court business so that it can be properly served is difficult and time consuming. It pays to take the time to consider why staff are leaving and encourage and solicit feedback. If court leaders have access to exit surveys, these should be reviewed to determine barriers to stability within the IT area. Are the staff members spread so thin that they are overworked? Are they able to take reasonable time off, or does the court lack backup coverage options? Are staff feeling a sense of achievement and job satisfaction? Are certain managers viewed negatively? Do the salaries of IT positions, especially in comparison to other government entities, provide a disincentive to work for the court? These and other questions should help business leaders to seek solutions that make the work environment more attractive and less likely to result in a revolving door of key IT staff members.

This process again addresses the hard fact that in a field that is ruled by salary needs and highly competitive hiring, personal engagement and respectful communication between staff and employer are of paramount importance. Even situations where communication fails or staff concerns cannot be met should be regarded as learning experiences for the court. The court should position itself so that concerns are understood, so that if they cannot always be fully addressed, they can be anticipated in the future.

### The IT Organizational Culture

Change in the IT organization provides an opportunity to examine the work environment to make it more attractive to candidates. The court environment has many advantages for applicants, such as good benefits, stability, and contributing to the essential work done by an organization with societal importance. Work/life balance, technical opportunities, empowerment, challenging and interesting work with career progression are major themes in hiring that most candidates seriously consider.

To hire the right candidate, courts should determine their present and future direction for the court, then outline the IT vision that supports the court's plans. Is the court a traditional environment where IT only provides desktop support and network services? Is there software development in-house? Is the court looking to innovate, or to maintain the status quo? A new hire may be frustrated by a court environment where innovation is not welcome, whereas other new hires may not have the ability to contribute to an innovative court that wishes to move to Software as a Service (SaaS) or other advancements.

Hiring a new Chief Information Officer (CIO) or a critical IT staff member may present an opportunity to re-think where the enterprise wants to be in the future and how staff can be organized to serve that vision. Courts may wish to consult a neutral third-party who can assist in looking objectively at the environment and suggest ways to approach this.

Upper-level staff might be expected to execute a given vision or roadmap, or the court might be looking for someone to assist in developing a vision with a supporting roadmap. A CIO is often the visionary involved in the IT strategic plan while less senior IT managers that manage operations or application development may provide more detailed planning and project management documentation.

When IT employees feel that their input is being requested, considered, and valued in an ongoing manner, the chances of longer-term retention are increased.

### Reviewing the Right Work Location & Teleworking Flexibility<sup>1</sup>

As with all business units within the court, the pandemic has forced courts to re-examine the IT work environment. For many IT staff members, the ability to work from home is a new and welcome change from the often-cramped court IT space. Flexibility in work hours can further incentivize IT workers to join or remain with a court. Some IT staff need to be on-site during certain working hours to install and maintain courtroom equipment, install servers, etc. though the ability to use remote toolsets may require this less frequently.

Ensuring IT staff satisfaction in the changing workspace will require analysis of the advantages and disadvantages inherent in both the courthouse and the home environment. Advantages that are exclusive to one aspect should be balanced, if possible, by advantages in the other.

Courts considering hiring staff that work remotely, but live in another state should involve HR in the policy development and hiring process in order to understand the complexity this may create for payroll and other state-based rules and consideration of whether supporting in-state jobs is a priority for the court system.

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<sup>1</sup> See the publication from the CCJ/COSCA Court Management Committee “Things a Court Manager Should Consider Regarding Remote Work”

### Determining Whether a Position Can Be Remote, on Premise, or Hybrid

From a technology perspective, most IT staff positions can work at least partially remotely. Remote desktop management, server management and similar tools are very robust.

A more important question is how much time is needed on-site to serve the needs of the business. This again depends on an analysis of the business needs. Staff cohesion is an important consideration as well as management control. The pandemic has allayed some fears that staff would be unproductive off-site.

Software development positions, such as business/systems analysts, are more difficult to perform without some in-person communication, although remote meetings have worked well for some. Tasks like courtroom and server/network equipment management and replacement must be performed by a staff member or contractor on-site. If there are immediate needs, it is crucial they are readily available.

It is unclear how many staff members will return to full-time office work after the pandemic, but the ability to work from home, at least partially, will continue to cause more candidates to be interested in working for the courts.

The most important asset between the court and IT staff in this new normal will be a mutual sense of trust. The court should trust employees to behave in a professional manner regardless of the degree of the staff position's remoteness. Similarly, employees should understand that the privilege of remote work will be fully contingent upon the court's ability to ensure that tasks are performed professionally in a timely manner. When the court exhibits trust, the employee will either return that trust or will understand the basis of policy changes that require additional supervision of underperforming staff.

### Determining and Improving the Court Environment

To assist in determining the state of the IT environment, it is helpful to survey or interview existing staff from both the IT and business side of the house to determine how IT is viewed and utilized. In some cases, anonymous staff surveys are helpful. Court leaders should refrain from making assumptions. Hiring officials may be surprised at what the results are when the details are examined.

Once the results of an environmental analysis are provided, court leaders should work to prioritize and address the issues by creating a team that includes both business and IT staff members to brainstorm and determine the actions that can be taken to achieve an improved environment. Some of the actions include:

**Limiting Conflict:** In some courts, an adversarial relationship between court and IT staff members and internally within IT may cause unpleasant working conditions. This is often due to an unhealthy governance model that pits the needs of end-users against limited IT resources. IT staff are often faced with an ever-changing array of priorities in a “shot-gun” approach. There may be multiple judges or administrators each demanding a varied form of technology that becomes impossible to support, or unrealistic expectations about if and when a technology project is feasible.

To limit conflict, the court should establish a healthy IT governance model that clearly identifies and communicates IT priorities and resource limitations. This should include key business stakeholders and IT staff members that can assist in evaluating impacts to resources.

**Encouraging Innovation:** Unengaged or unstimulated staff members rarely stay very long in any position. To be seen as an attractive employer, courts need to be innovative in advancing the knowledge and skills of staff and providing them with opportunities to learn and try new things.

**Embracing Failure:** Courts are often risk averse in considering IT innovation and may look for a scapegoat anytime something goes wrong in IT. However, innovation necessarily means that there will be failures. Like most businesses, courts need to provide safe places for staff to try new things and possibly fail. Courts can establish a governance model and mechanisms that encourage the innovation, permit failure, and protect the organization from major risk. Using a gated approach to major projects can assist with this and allow court leaders to terminate the project at certain points if satisfactory progress is not being made. Building and maintaining IT sandboxes may not seem like a mission critical effort, but it will pay off in establishing new skills and providing new IT services.

There will sometimes be IT failures in production environments. While we should take every opportunity to prevent these, they need to be viewed as opportunities to examine lessons learned and to practice failovers rather than personal failures, as long as they do not happen repeatedly. They also provide a window into fail-safe mechanisms and procedures that need to be fortified and can lead to IT improvement when thoughtfully examined.

**Continuing Education:** Most IT staff members do not want their skills to become stale, but continuing education is often viewed as a luxury. Later, the court may not understand why long-term staff lack the skill set needed to move on to the next innovation. Courts must provide continuing education opportunities for IT staff. The recommendation is at least one week per year. Otherwise, the court may face the need to reorganize and eliminate or reposition staff that do not have skills to move forward.



Courts should also require that IT staff spend at least a week each year in a courtroom and/or with staff outside of IT. This will increase their knowledge and understanding of the court and processes, as well as allow them to see how their work benefits the courts.

**Communicating the Value of Court IT Work:** As court IT staff continue to perform their functions and to fulfill the organization's objectives, the court's management will need to ensure that contributing staff are made aware of the ongoing value of their work. When new projects and deliverables are fulfilled and placed into operation, the IT staff that participated in the development frequently do not fully understand the value and ongoing impact of the improvements they have just delivered. To address this matter and to reinforce employee awareness of the inherent value of their contributions, managers should consider allowing IT staff to routinely visit courtrooms and operational areas, perhaps taking half a day to observe and consider the benefits of their work.

### Hiring Versus Outsourcing

In private industry, the saying "never outsource your competitive edge" is often quoted. It could be said that for courts, the primary edge is serving the public and providing access to justice. Therefore, courts should evaluate how outsourcing certain IT functions will impact the ability to deliver on these key purposes.

Outsourcing IT functions can produce cost savings and efficiency, and should become a primary consideration when staff do not possess a skillset and the need for that skillset is a short-term. Outsourcing certain IT functions may be a good business decision for courts when there is high turnover in IT positions, a project requires specialized skillsets, or the timeline to deliver an IT project is unacceptable. However, outsourcing too many key functions may result in staffing that is not in-tune with the core business values of the court. There may be an ever-rotating group of contractors that do not build an affinity with other court staff members. The contractors may not understand the priority of tasks and what areas are critical for proper operations. For example, the significance of losing a day of case management data entry may not be fully understood. There may be inefficiencies in contractors needing to learn another unique court system or providing solutions that do not fit based on previous experiences with other systems that are dissimilar without understanding the difference (such as unified or decentralized systems) or barriers based on different laws or rules.

Another critical factor in determining when and what to outsource is the effect this has on employee morale with IT. If the lower-level tasks such as setting up computers are outsourced, this may be welcome and improve morale. But if staff are relegated to maintenance and menial tasks while the contractors are doing the new and exciting projects (at higher rates of pay), this can have an adverse effect on the staff.

Courts may wish to consider alternative staffing models such as staff augmentation rather than fully outsourcing the project. Courts also need to determine the exact difference between the concepts of on-shoring, near-shoring, and off-shoring<sup>2</sup>. These considerations can have significant repercussions in terms of differences in language and customs as diverse staff members in various locations integrate their work activities with the court.

Courts should remember that they have the most control over full-time employees. This can often be supplemented by outsourcing, use of contractors, or free-lancers. The question of how best to utilize staff should involve weighing the benefits and risks of using a contracting firm or other non-employee resources versus the cost and ability to fully utilize an in-house employee. Employers should also consider the potential for resentment to arise between the various types of IT employees, particularly if perceived work advantages or disadvantages are communicated by staff.

Courts utilizing outsourcing will need internal staff with experience in managing external contracts and resources, which is a non-traditional IT skill set. Additionally, courts using outsourcing will need to develop service level agreements as well as monitor and enforce them.

Conduct a cost-benefit analysis to determine the value of an employee versus a contractor, considering all costs such as salary and benefits, and contract costs and associated software and maintenance.

### Direct Hire Versus Hiring a Contractor

A primary consideration for whether to hire a contractor versus a direct hire may center on the cost to the court, whether there is a full-time staff position to fill or that can be created, how long the need will exist for that specific skill, and whether there is sufficient expertise and experience in the recruitment pool from which to hire an employee. Hiring a contractor who had a prior role in the organization may be easy but may come at a greater cost and less control over their time. In some cases, companies claim to “pre-screen” contract candidates, but this needs to be fully verified prior to hiring. The court should consider whether the position is a long-term role and understand the trade-off that is required with a contractor, in terms of longevity, staff affinity and cost.

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<sup>2</sup> These concepts have to do where work is performed – on-shoring is within the country, but typically at a cheaper geographic area; near-shoring is generally with a bordering country; off-shoring is outside of the country without regard to how far or near.

“Right to hire” consultancies are often advantageous because they provide the ability to “try before you buy.” However, carefully examine the terms of the right to hire arrangement because it often includes a large fee at the time of hiring.

### Developing and Implementing Your Search Strategy

Hiring a key IT position provides the opportunity to re-evaluate your search strategy. Too often, job announcements are slightly revised and re-used every time a position needs to be filled. It is important to review other job announcements for similar positions on the market. Hiring officials will notice that quality of life and the work environment are heavily emphasized for competitive positions. For this reason, it is important to emphasize and market the good things that court employment may provide. These include:

**Importance of Public Service:** Courts have an important role to play in serving the public and society. This is often not conveyed to or fully understood by IT staff. Impressing on candidates that their position may have a lasting effect on the good of others may make a difference in the position’s appeal. Public access to court information, for example, allows a litigant to follow their case on-line so that they know what is happening. Without this, they might have to contact their attorney or the court. E-filing creates a way to quickly file on a case without having to use mail or personal delivery. Developing a tool to audit financial records in guardianship cases can ensure that the elderly and incapacitated are not defrauded or exploited. There are many other great projects in IT that facilitate case management and provide for the ability of the court to meet the needs of the public. Sharing information about paradigm-shifting access to justice projects like online dispute resolution or legal access portals can be hooks to interest possible candidates.

Help IT staff understand the value their projects and the stability of the IT environment bring to both the court and the public at large. New projects should be started with a clear vision statement that emphasizes this value and provides IT staff with a clear view of the ultimate goals. This provides them with job satisfaction so that they can take pride in these accomplishments.

**Work/Life Balance:** Traditionally, IT staff have been expected to work long hours. That assumption is changing as IT staffing includes workers expecting better job conditions. Courts offer many paid holidays and good vacation day allocation, which many other businesses may not provide.

When reviewing the IT staff organization, ensure there is proper coverage so on-call responsibilities can be rotated. Managing the expectations of senior court administrators is paramount given the reliance on “always on” systems such as e-filing portals. It is expected that upon an emergency, IT staff will remediate the outage

whenever it may occur with little or no regard to the service hours such as holidays, weekends and approved leave. Courts should expect IT staff to work primarily during regular court hours and weekdays. When work cannot be performed during regular hours, staff should receive compensation, flexible schedule opportunities, and be able to work remotely, whenever possible.

**Benefits:** For some candidates, a list of benefits will be critical because some private corporations tend to fully list these details in a position description, and the absence of such information will be noted by an applicant. The court should consider providing a link within the position description that offers fuller details on available benefits for those candidates who wish to review the more detailed information.

### Considerations for Posting Technical Court Positions

When the court is preparing to post a position for the public, attention must be paid to the level and type of position that is required. Different levels of technical experts tend to view opportunities in different media venues, depending on their interests and specialization. For positions in which the court is seeking a lower-tier technician with the aim of hiring at a lower salary level and training over time, positions could likely be posted at universities or community colleges. For more experienced technicians, the court should consider that qualified persons will typically be viewing social media platforms, such as Facebook, LinkedIn, or Reddit, where they come into contact with employment opportunities. Many courts tend to only advertise their positions through traditional venues, such as newspapers and government employment office sites. It is rare that IT professionals read traditional newspapers. Broadening position postings can increase the number of appropriate applicants that could fulfill the court's needs. The positions should be advertised on the court's own website, as well as on technical recruiting sites frequented by IT professionals such as LinkedIn and Indeed.

Another area of consideration is minimum qualifications. Depending on the position, professional certifications such as project management (PMP), cybersecurity (CISSP) and others are more relevant than a college degree. Since technology changes so rapidly, recent experience should be weighted more heavily than knowledge, education and experience from decades prior.

### The Right Candidate

Every position should have a clear and detailed job description that outlines what the role will be in the organization, and what will be expected of the successful candidate. It is a best practice to review and revise the job description prior to the job search and to regularly review the job description once the successful candidate is in place. The job description can provide a basis for resume review.

During this review, it is a good idea to take into consideration the court's IT objectives one more time. If the court wishes to maintain the status quo, a candidate who is innovative may not be the right choice. If the court plans many changes, a candidate with a demonstrated background of self-initiated projects and innovation is likely the best fit.

The pandemic time period is one of disruptive change, for good and bad. Position descriptions should include professional consideration of potential future disruptions, as unplanned situations may force innovation out of necessity, rather than planned changes driven by the court and/or IT staff.

When recruitment of a desired IT staff candidate fails, the court may want to reach out to determine the reasons an individual applicant did not accept employment. If the reason was salary-dependent, there is little the court can do to improve its efforts attracting IT talent due to the extremely competitive nature of the field. However, courts can seek to highlight non-salary advantages to working for the courts. If valid non-salary reasons are communicated, the feedback should be taken seriously so that the court can improve its future hiring efforts.

### Compensation Considerations

Prior to posting an open position, Human Resources should conduct a thorough review of both public and private sector compensation for similar positions in the local community as well as the broader industry. This review should include cost-neutral benefits such as the flexibility to work from home, as well as bonuses, stock options, and profit sharing. While it is unlikely courts can compete directly with the private sector on compensation and benefits, it is important to understand the market and to offer a salary range that can compete with other government sector employers for similar positions. Some courts have compensation limits (for example, CIOs can't make more than a judge), that may need to be re-considered. Historically, salary exceptions have been granted to court reporters. If the search is not yielding the number or quality of candidates sought, that indicates an issue with the salary range that must be addressed. To hire and retain competent IT staff, judges will need to advocate for competitive IT salaries.

While the court must contend with market forces and budget constraints, salary can be enhanced with other desirable benefits such as flextime, teleworking, and greater autonomy in decision-making. Courts can also effectively compete for staff who seek intangible benefits such as doing work that is meaningful, challenging, and interesting work that is for the greater good and to advance justice.

### Equipment Considerations

In defining the requirements and monetary aspects of an IT position, court leaders should also review the work and remote activity expectations for the new position. If IT staff will be required to use personal electronic property (such as cell phones and laptop

computers) to fulfill their tasks, that expectation should be acknowledged and written into the position description. In making this determination, court leadership should consider whether it would make more budgetary sense for the court to provide the needed equipment that will be carried and operated by staff.

### Screening and Evaluating Your Candidates

Form a diverse team to perform the evaluation task that consists of both business and technical staff. Involving some business stakeholders in hiring technical staff allows for a better evaluation of their “fit” in terms of culture and values. Develop a set of standard interview questions that focus not only on technical proficiency, but also the applicant’s aptitude, ambition, motivation, drive, customer service, and leadership abilities.

Include an exercise that reflects the type of work done by that position in the actual workplace that the applicant completes after the interview questions are over. The exercise will provide the opportunity to understand how the candidate approaches a problem and can test a specific skill or the ability to communicate in writing. Depending on the level of the position, the task should be completed in an hour or half hour. It is helpful to review the completed exercise blindly where the reviewer is unaware of the identity of the candidate. Consider directing the candidate to send the completed exercise to HR and have HR assign each candidate a number for a blind review by the evaluation team.

Where appropriate, provide qualified internal IT staff with the opportunity to interview for the position. Ensure that position advertising hits a wide field of applicants, including those from other government agencies or military members who will be separating or retiring. Hiring IT staff that have government experience may be advantageous in that they understand some of the challenges faced by courts.

Set a reasonable timeline for recruitment and selection of a candidate so that the job announcement does not become stale. There should be adequate time to obtain qualified candidates.

Although the court cannot control many recruitment variables, such as knowing who will respond to the position posting(s), the court should remain vigilant in considering the potential diversity of the applicant pool when interview and hiring decisions are being made. All qualified applicants must be given the same opportunity to interview, regardless of their gender identity, race, age, or societal background. The court’s IT department should reflect the collective work culture of the judges, the staff, and the community in which the court resides. There will be times that judges and staff will respond more readily to IT assistance if they feel that the department is representative of the judiciary as a whole and its diverse workforce.



### Phone and Video Interview and Prescreening

Appoint several members of the hiring committee to review and recommend a set of resumes for interviews that can further identify the best candidates. This shortens the hiring time in which good candidates can be quickly identified. If necessary, divide the resumes up for review and screen them by phone. Once several good candidates are identified, the team can perform in-person or remote interviews to further evaluate the candidates.

Courts should determine up front if interviews will be done via phone or video. It is important to be consistent in order to not advantage one candidate over another. Video interviews can provide the potential advantages of allowing face-to-face time, body language interpretation, and immediate familiarity between the interviewee and the court. It also communicates to the candidate the technical capability of the court.

### Importance of Hiring Agility

Courts are often unaccustomed to making quick decisions, but the need for long deliberation may negatively affect the hiring strategy. The best candidates are often looking at various job opportunities at the same time and may accept another position while the court is considering them. The hiring team should seek to act quickly to make a hiring selection. A suggested approach is to do a phone interview within a week of receiving a qualified candidate's application so the candidate knows the court is interested. Then the court should have regular contact with those candidates so they know there is still interest.

### Handling Transitions

When IT experiences a major transition, such as the loss of a CIO or key IT manager, other staff members often become apprehensive about the future. Communication is key during a transition, especially if it is likely to result in a reorganization. Otherwise, staff tend to imagine the worst. It is often necessary and beneficial to hire an interim person in the key role to provide this communication and consistency until the right hire is found. With the right expertise, the interim person can provide the objective view needed to provide advice on IT reorganization, environmental issues and hiring that court business leaders may need. And in some cases, an interim hire might be a viable solution to the court's current level of need.

### Developing an Onboarding Plan and Strategies

It is best to develop an onboarding strategy long before the candidate is hired, especially for key IT roles. Good onboarding is thought to be a key strategy for employee retention.

Some key on-boarding strategies include:

- Start onboarding prior to hiring by exposing candidates to court culture. Be honest about what working for the courts is like and what they are likely to experience.
- Examine and optimize the onboarding process. Though this may traditionally be an HR function, it may need to be reviewed and revised considering modern expectations.
- Identify necessary training and expect it to be on-going.
- Identify and discuss with the candidate the tools you will provide to them, or that they believe they need, so that they can effectively and successfully perform their job.
- Assist the new hire in forming a network of supportive colleagues and provide a mentor.
- Train in not just the business and job functions, but also about the court structure and culture. Assist new hires in understanding the context for their work, not just the day-to-day duties.

## Retention Strategy

When reviewing candidates for a position, it is important to review their job history to determine the reason for short employment phases. Once hired, employees that feel a strong bond with their employer are more likely to stay longer.

IT employees need to feel that they are growing in their job and gaining new skills through training. They need to clearly understand their role and responsibilities. This should be reviewed with them on a regular basis.

Encourage cross-team collaboration, as well as the feeling of having open access to talk with leadership and business management. Identify a clearly defined path to career progression. Encourage diversity and inclusion, and create a culture of mentorship.

Due to the ever-changing shifts in technology information and necessary awareness, IT staff will need to be offered continuing opportunities for education improvement. Due to the inherent value in ongoing IT education and increasing expertise, such learning opportunities can validly be posed as personnel benefits rather than organizationally-imposed obligations. While many training resources are available for little charge or even for free, the court should be prepared to offer staff necessary reimbursement and the time to engage in educational self-improvement. A combination of individual course work for technicians (based on their primary function) coupled with



group course work (based on specialization and departmental work missions) can ensure that the entire team and its work culture are strengthened over time.

Competent IT personnel often become overloaded, while those who are struggling get more attention. Staff may be rewarded with recognition in a court newsletter or benefits, such as a more flexible workday after a long haul. A celebratory meal or potluck picnic may mean a lot to staff when they complete a major project.

Recognition by upper business management, rather than just IT managers, often goes a long way to increasing employee satisfaction. This reinforces the concept that what IT does serves the business and the public in a unique way.

## Succession Planning

Succession planning is the process of developing future leaders in your IT staff or replacing key staff members with new employees.

The steps in developing a succession plan include:

- Identify key positions within the IT organization
- Assessing the risk of those positions becoming vacant through looking at retirement dates and turnover rates
- Identify and develop staff members who are currently in the IT organization
- Develop existing personnel that may be transitioned into key roles through mentoring, training, education and similar strategies; and
- Develop a strategy for sudden loss of a key staff member, such as the ability to contract for interim personnel.
- For critical IT roles (such as maintaining courtroom audio/visual equipment), the court should consider double filling the position. Even if the work can currently be done by one person, the load of time, responsibility, and pressure might exceed what a single technician can be expected to handle in the long term without burning out of self-terminating employment.

Good succession planning is not unique to IT, but inadequate planning may lead to operational gaps that cannot be easily filled. Thinking ahead may save a project that might otherwise fail without a plan in place to replace a key staff member.