

Just Ask a Judge Program Description

Just Ask a Judge is an interactive Q/A session and discussion with a judge and volunteer attorneys that stimulates participants to prepare and ask meaningful questions about issues, observations, and their concerns about the courts. The judge and attorneys create a safe and welcoming environment for participants to ask tough questions and to break through stereotypes. The program can be 30 minutes or longer, and can be conducted virtually, in courts, or in classrooms. The program requires one federal judge to preside, and additional attorneys or staff as needed, keeping in mind many facets of diversity that reflect the demographics of the participants and the many types of legal careers.

In Advance of the Program - Facilitators

- Think about your reason(s) for choosing the law in a way that focuses on your feelings and values, your life adversities, and successes, rather than your resume. Think about:
 - A moment, or a life circumstance that made you want a career in the law.
 - How your personal story and priorities counter the stereotype that law is about money; arguing, and a win/lose mentality.
- Consider your presentation style - encourage participants to ask questions about what is really on their mind, and invite participants to consider careers in the law and remind them of the many possibilities: judges, lawyers, jurors, journalists, and engaged citizens.

Categories of Questions - Participants

- **Personal – Your Journey**
 - Challenges and Obstacles
 - Help Along the Way and How to Get It
 - Dealing with Discrimination Then and Now
 - Positive Influences on Your Success *in school and now*
 - How Your Life Has Prepared You to Be a Judge/Attorney
- **Professional – Your Experiences and Perspectives**
 - Personal Opinions v. Responsibilities as a Judge
 - Ethical Dilemmas for Lawyers, e.g., Representing a “Guilty” Defendant
 - Role of Public Opinion in Interacting with Clients and in Making Decisions
 - Dealing with Biases in Yourself and Others: Race, LGBTQ+ Issues, Socio-Economic
 - Questions about Difficult Cases/Decisions

Participant Preparation

With Students: The teacher could select a video(s) to show prior to the event.

- Students brainstorm questions about 1) the video; 2) the guest judge and lawyers; and 3) the courts and the justice system.

Video Options:

1. **Rule of Law in Your Life:** [Video](#) (7 minutes) and **Quiz to Stimulate Student Questions:** [The Impact of the Federal Courts on Your Daily Life](#) (Law on the Clock)
2. **Video:** [Fair and Impartial Judiciary](#) (7 minutes) and **Graphic Organizer to [Help Students Write Their Questions](#).**

With Adults: The presenting judge/attorneys give participants a few minutes at the event to turn to someone next to them and develop a couple of questions. The judge can show a one-minute video: [Federal Judges' Oath of Office](#), and opens the floor to questions and discussion.

Questions? Want to get involved in this program?

Email: civics@ca4.uscourts.gov