

OPTIMAL STAFFING FORMULA DEVELOPMENT METHODOLOGY

Court Support Personnel

The following staffing formula was developed as a part of the Public Policy Research Institute (PPRI) at Texas A&M University's 2024 study, "The Hidden Backbone of Justice: Insights into Staffing Levels and Salaries of Court Support Personnel," commissioned by the Texas Office of Court Administration (OCA) in response to a legislative rider to assess the staffing levels and salaries of court personnel across Texas.

The study examined the perceptions of workload, hiring challenges, retention issues, and compensation disparities in Texas' district courts, statutory county courts, statutory probate courts, and OCA children's courts. Additionally, it provides data-driven recommendations to optimize staffing levels and salaries to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the Texas justice system.

A key deliverable of this project was to develop a formula to aid county leaders in estimating the number of staff needed to effectively and efficiently support the courts and clerks' offices of their jurisdictions. The research team completed this task through a five-phase process:

Literature Review

In the first phase, the research team conducted a literature review, divided into four distinct categories: ideal staffing models outside of the criminal justice system; previous studies of judicial and court effectiveness; previous studies evaluating judicial workload; and previous studies evaluating the workloads of court support personnel.

Stakeholder Interviews and Review of Statutes to Identify Primary Job Functions

In the second phase, the research team reviewed different Texas statutes, summarized survey responses, and worked with court staff and clerks through multiple virtual meetings to define a list of job functions and tasks which could be generalized across different jurisdictions. The research team referenced the findings from the stakeholder interviews and relevant Texas statutes to compile a specific list of job functions as the first component of the formula. Additionally, recognizing the vast differences between courts of the different jurisdictions in Texas, the research team constructed the formula framework to allow for the addition of up to two additional job functions that may be specific to the court utilizing the formula to allow for customization based on their needs. The list below summarizes the primary job functions identified for the court support personnel.

Court Support Personnel Job Functions

- Manage court operations, including consulting with the judge, working with other court staff, and coordinating the transfer of inmates
- Manage the court calendar/docket
- Administrative support to the court
- Assist the judge with court proceedings
- Assist with activities supporting probate and guardianship cases in the court
- Coordinate the request for juries for the court with the District Clerk
- Auditing court reports and dockets to comply with reporting guidelines
- Assist in the development of court guidelines, procedures, and standards
- Administrative support for county processes as requested by the judge and other departments

- Participate in required professional development and training

Delphi Panels to Create Time Estimates for Each of the Primary Job Functions

In the third phase, the research team developed time estimates for each of the tasks for each primary job function by conducting two Delphi Panels and one-on-one meetings with stakeholders. The time estimates refer to the number of hours needed to complete one task per week by one staff member (**Table 1**). It is important to note, the total number of hours across the formula do not necessarily add up to 40 hours as the research team recognizes one staff member may not be responsible for all the tasks.

Table 1 : Estimated Time Per Function

Main Job Function	# of hours by 1 staff for 1 task per week
Manage court operations, including consulting with the judge, working with other court staff, and coordinating the transfer of inmates	15
Manage the court calendar/docket	4
Administrative support to the court	3
Assist the judge with court proceedings	12
Assist with activities supporting probate and guardianship cases in the court	10
Coordinate the request for juries for the court with the District Clerk	0.5
Auditing court reports and dockets to comply with reporting guidelines	2
Assist in the development of court guidelines, procedures, and standards	1
Administrative support for county processes as requested by the judge and other departments	2
Participate in required professional development and training	1

Formula Development

Once the primary job functions were defined as listed in Table 1, the research team identified additional specific variables to construct the formula around. For the staffing formula framework, the research team identified the following variables as necessary for inclusion:

- Job functions
- Number of tasks within each job function
- Amount of time per task to complete each job function
- Number of hours per week to complete the number of tasks specified by the stakeholder
- Number of staff needed to complete the number of tasks specified by the stakeholder
- Number of current staff employed in the court or clerks' office
- Number of staff needed to meet the workload demand of each job function
- Number of tasks needed to meet the workload demand of the entire court or clerks' office

In addition to the above listed variables, the research team identified the need to build in miscellaneous allowance time to the formula. This miscellaneous allowance accounts for staff time between tasks or time spent performing other essential tasks which may not be covered in the specific job functions of the formula. The research team set the calculation for miscellaneous allowance at 10%. Additionally, to account for time off as described in the county's benefits package, the research team assumed two weeks paid time off per staff member, which accounts for 80 hours per year, which in turn translates into 1.5

hours per week (or 3.75% of a typical 40 hours work week) per staff that would need to be accounted for. Hence, the research team increased the miscellaneous allowance to 13.75% to account for vacation time. The research team did not include any state or federal holidays as the implicit assumption is on those days, there is no official work done in the county.

After establishing the job function variables, the research team next considered the units for each task. The research team considered using case filings as many previous studies have done, however, based on interviews with stakeholders and review of the literature, determined case filings alone would not account for the workload of the court support personnel. Ultimately, the research team determined that each job function should have an individual unit based on the job function. For example, the job function of 'Managing the Court's Calendar/Docket' would be interpreted as one calendar/docket per day, up to five days per week.

Formula Validation Through Cognitive Interviews and Testing

In the fifth and final phase, the research team conducted a series of cognitive interviews with past participants to validate the formula. In these interviews, the research team walked each participant through their respective formula for confirmation of the findings and usability. Additionally, the research team shared a draft of the formula with two jurisdictions for testing. The first jurisdiction applied their own data points to evaluate the clerk's formula, while the second focused on assessing the court support personnel formula. Both jurisdictions expressed support for the developed formula, acknowledging its potential to effectively estimate staffing needs.

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