



# RECRUITING THE GEN Z PROSECUTOR

NOVEMBER 2022



**PCE**



**INNOVATIVE  
PROSECUTION  
SOLUTIONS**



# Recruiting the Gen Z Prosecutor

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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This article was written by Senior Attorney Sophia Roach and Executive Director Kristine Hamann, both from the Prosecutors' Center for Excellence (PCE). The article is based in part on a compilation of excellent advice provided in two PCE Pop Ups on Recruitment and Retention. [Recruitment and Retention - Part 1](#) (May 12, 2022) and [Recruitment and Retention – Part 2](#) (July 7, 2022). The presenters at these PCE Pop Ups included: Kimberly Spahos, Executive Director, North Carolina Conference of District Attorneys; Sheila Polk, County Attorney, Yavapai County (AZ); Sherry Bevan Walsh, Prosecutor, Summit County (OH); Shawnalyse Ochoa, Assistant Chief — Juvenile Division, San Diego County (CA); Nell Christensen, Chief Deputy District Attorney, Clark County (NV); Kristine Hamann, Executive Director of PCE; Noelle Dorman, Assistant Director of Projects and Employer Development, California Western School of Law; Barry Weiss, Special Advisor — Career Services, Syracuse University College of Law; Malak Behrouznami, Deputy District Attorney, San Diego County (CA); Stephanie De Jesus, Deputy District Attorney, San Diego County (CA); Alphonse Williams, Assistant District Attorney, Onondaga County (NY). Holly Ludvigson and Dylan Kang, PCE interns from Georgetown Law School, also contributed excellent insights.

This paper was supported by Grant No. 2017-YX-BX-K002 awarded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance to AEquitas. The Bureau of Justice Assistance is a component of the Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs, which also includes the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Institute of Justice, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, the Office for Victims of Crime, and the SMART Office. Points of view or opinions in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.

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# Recruiting the Gen Z Prosecutor

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## INTRODUCTION

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Prosecutors throughout the country have seen a sharp decline in applications for new positions. Understaffed offices face a combination of challenges, from COVID backlogs to increases in violent crime. Prosecution work offers stable employment, a living wage, a foundation for political office or the bench, and an opportunity to serve the most vulnerable members of the community. However, outcry over policies that have contributed to longstanding inequities have diminished the once idealized view of America's prosecutors. Although prosecutors are on the front lines of developing collaborative courts, community-oriented sentencing practices, and innovative approaches to working with victims and the community, these aspects of their work are not penetrating the marble halls of law schools. Few law students realize that while public defenders vigilantly ensure the rights of a single person, prosecutors have greater power to improve the criminal justice system.

The newest law graduates belong to Generation Z, also known as Gen Z or Zoomers, who were born between 1997 and 2012 (ages 10 to 25). Gen Z grads are laser-focused on impact—they know they have a voice and want to be heard. They desire financial stability and a quality of life outside of work. Gen Z professionals are ultra-adept at acquiring technical skills and seek office cultures that are collaborative and supportive. The following recommendations for recruiting Gen Z prosecutors are based on conversations with law school career services professionals, prosecutors, prosecution recruiters, and law students.

## THE POSITIVES OF PROSECUTION WORK

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The oldest of the Gen Z generation are just finishing law school and ready to make an impact in the world around them. As part of a generation that grew up with active shooter drills and an increased awareness of the inequities in our criminal justice system, they are motivated to make a difference. These young grads are tailor-made for the type of public service that prosecutors do every day, such as



working with those who have been victimized, those who have lost loved ones, those who have been trafficked, or those who have been defrauded. This generation is focused on the outcomes of prosecution, and rightfully so. What they may not realize is that prosecutors are already hard at work on the changes they desire.



## Policies and Programs of Interest to Gen Z Applicants

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While many prosecutor offices share the work they are doing with their constituents, they may be missing an important opportunity to share the impact of their work with law students, college students, and high school students. Planting a seed of interest about prosecution is helpful at all educational levels.

When contacting potential Gen Z recruits, the recruiter should emphasize programs in the office that resonate with new lawyers. The programs can include:

### *Trainings*

- Anti-bias trainings
- Trainings for new lawyers
- Recurring management training



### *Policies*

- Remote work options
- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion programs
- Development of conviction/sentencing review units
- Policy changes that promote equity
- Diversion programs
- Restorative justice programs
- Post-custody transition programs
- Homeless outreach
- Violence prevention programs



## Collaborative Courts

- Drug treatment programs
- Mental health court
- Veterans' court
- Human trafficking court



## Community Outreach

- Community advisory boards
- Participation by prosecutors in community and education events
- Citizen academies
- DA open houses
- Expungement clinics
- School programs that promote literacy or social-emotional development
- Anti-violence multidisciplinary response teams, including Coordinated Community Responses, Sexual Assault Response Teams, Child Advocacy Centers, and Human Trafficking Task Forces



## Evolving Role of the Prosecutor

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When meeting with applicants, prosecutors can discuss the broad and evolving role of the prosecutor, which includes many aspects that may be of surprise to Gen Zs, such as:

- The duty to serve the public, including the accused
- Their work to remedy abuses in power dynamics (*e.g.*, child abuse and exploitation, human trafficking, elder abuse, sexual assault, domestic violence, wage theft, hate crimes, voter suppression, and public corruption)
- Their commitment to serve all victims, including victims in communities of color
- A prosecutor's work to reduce racial disparities and mass incarceration

## Trials

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The core function of a prosecutor's office is to protect public safety and trying a criminal case is an essential part of that work. Trials are a big asset of a prosecutor office. Learning how to be a trial lawyer is central to a prosecutor's

work and is a selling point for Gen Z applicants. Trials, as well as the associated investigations, are exciting and challenging. However, as the work is discussed with applicants, they should understand that the work takes grit, resilience, and strength and that it has enormous stakes for the community, victims, and defendants. The Gen Z applicant must also know that in appropriate cases, public safety demands incarceration. Applicants should learn about a prosecutor's obligation to achieve justice and collaborate with the community, but they should also leave with a realistic understanding of what the job entails.

## ECONOMIC BENEFITS

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Surprisingly, a prosecutor office provides economic benefits to its legal staff that may not be immediately apparent to applicants.



### Prosecutor Salaries

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To attract the best candidates, prosecutor offices must be proactive in seeking appropriate pay for their newest recruits. To achieve this goal, it is important to know how new prosecutor salaries stand up against other entry level legal salaries in the local community. For example, the prosecutor should gather the starting salary for a local public defender, county attorney, or assistant attorney general. It is also useful to know the salaries in surrounding prosecutor offices, as they can range dramatically even within one state. The following charts provide some context for prosecutor salaries across the nation (2018) and in one state (2021).



Starting Salaries from 2018 BJA Survey of 530 Prosecutor Offices <sup>1</sup>	
State	Average Salary
Nevada	\$ 68,046
Connecticut	\$ 67,421
Minnesota	\$ 63,611
Arizona	\$ 62,360
Washington	\$ 60,534
Utah	\$ 60,159
Indiana	\$ 60,125
New York	\$ 59,934
Montana	\$ 59,807
Colorado	\$ 59,770
Delaware	\$ 59,141
Iowa	\$ 58,646
New Jersey	\$ 58,435
Virginia	\$ 57,166
New Mexico	\$ 55,418
Michigan	\$ 51,616
Missouri	\$ 50,902
South Carolina	\$ 50,158
Tennessee	\$ 49,847
Louisiana	\$ 47,500
Kentucky	\$ 43,562
<b>AVERAGE</b>	<b>\$ 57,341</b>

<sup>1</sup> The 2018 survey was part of the National Prosecutor Consortium project that was supported by Award No. 2015-DP-BX-KOO4 awarded to Justice & Security Strategies, Inc. by the Bureau of Justice Assistance, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. PCE participated in this 2018 survey. The states represented in the 2018 survey were: Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Utah, Virginia, Washington. Of these, the analysis includes the twenty-two states where 33% of the prosecutor offices responded. This provided a cross-section of prosecutor offices in each represented state. These states were: Arizona, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, South Carolina, Tennessee, Utah, Virginia, Washington.

New York State District Attorneys (2021)	
# of ADAs	Starting Salary
>400	\$72,000
367	\$74,500
240	\$72,000 - \$75,000
239	\$68,000
105	\$60,000
>100	\$72,000
80	\$65,672
48	\$67,000
45	\$66,500
42	\$64,800
32	68,800
25	\$94,000
24	\$65,000
23	\$70,00
15	\$72,000
14	\$60,000
12	\$71,000
~10	\$68,000
<10	\$70,000 – \$75,000 (experience)
<10	\$70,000 (3 yrs. experience)
<10	\$68,422
9	\$76,000
8	\$71,000 - \$77,000
8	\$68,000
6	\$76,000
2	\$65,000 - \$70,000
1	\$50,000

## Pension and Health Benefits

Both Millennial and Gen Z lawyers grew up during the last recession and have voiced a desire to obtain more information about financial literacy and planning

for future stability. One of the best benefits that many public entities offer is a retirement package, including health insurance. While past generations may have wanted to get in the door without knowing all the details up front, younger attorneys may be attracted to an office because of the financial stability it offers. Also, though other legal jobs may offer a higher salary, they often have poor retirement or health insurance programs that cannot compare to what is offered by a prosecutor office.

## Financial Incentives for Working in a Prosecutor's Office

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There are many financial benefits to working in a prosecutor's office that may be unknown to Gen Z applicants. These benefits may include:

- Health Insurance
- Defined benefit retirement program
- Matching 401 plans
- 457(b) plans to reduce tax liability while saving
- On-site childcare
- Childcare/family care savings accounts or credits
- Paid Bar Dues
- Free continuing legal education opportunities
- Tuition reimbursement
- Clothing allowance
- Reduced public transportation fees
- Stipend for internet or home security monitoring
- Paid maternity/paternity leave
- Student loan payment assistance
- Public Service Loan Forgiveness
- Reimbursement of moving expenses
- Employee discounts negotiated by the county, especially for high-priced items such as cell phones, computers, or public transportation
- Education on first-time home buyer programs
- Education on retirement investing
- Wellness programs



## Student Loans

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On average, a law student leaves school with \$195,000 in student loans. It is no wonder then that economics play a key role in recruitment. Offices would benefit from understanding how Public Service Loan Forgiveness works and be ready to explain what an estimated loan payment might be on an income-driven repayment plan. If these terms are unfamiliar, StudentAid.gov is a resource to help explain this important benefit to prospective recruits. Alternatively, the office can ask a new prosecutor in the office who has recently navigated the process to help explain the different options. The new prosecutor can also meet with prospective applicants to outline how the programs work.

## OFFICE CULTURE

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A positive office culture is helpful for attracting talented applicants. An office culture designed to appeal to Gen Z applicants will embrace meaningful mentorship programs, opportunities for input, diversity, flexibility, and positive social interactions.



## Mentorship and Teamwork

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Today's law school graduates are looking to work in diverse, collaborative office environments with robust mentorship practices. To attract and keep the new talent that is critically needed to ease the burden of crushing caseloads, the traditional competitive environment needs to be examined. Though competition has historically been a prized feature of all office environments, younger attorneys may have different ideas about work-life balance than older employees. It may seem at first like there is less dedication to the job, but this new perspective may lead to healthier office relationships centered around teamwork, pride in group accomplishments, and more community outreach. Assigned mentorships and second-chair opportunities may also promote better lawyering and reduce missteps in early practice.



## Gen Z Input

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In recent polling,<sup>2</sup> Gen Z workers prized the opportunity for input into the governance of the organization where they work. While prosecutors' offices are generally run in a top-down manner, supervisors should consider how to provide opportunities for worker input and encourage their assistance in providing suggestions and implementing good ideas.

## Diversity

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New lawyers want to work in an office environment where diversity is valued and people with different perspectives are heard and respected. A welcoming environment includes the acceptance of affinity or equity-focused groups within the office. Offices with Diversity and Equity Committees should highlight these groups and welcome new lawyers to participate.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/global/Documents/deloitte-2022-genz-millennial-survey.pdf>  
(Last viewed August 2022)



## Flexible Work Schedules

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Flexibility is another highly desirable work feature. Flexibility may include modified workdays, four-day work weeks, job sharing, and remote work opportunities. Consistent, transparent, and equitable family leave policies are important for young lawyers who may have put off having children to complete school but lack accrued vacation time or other forms of leave in early stages of a career. Flexible time can also include time to do non-attorney related volunteer work, such as participating in office-related community events and education programs.



## Recognition

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Many prosecutors work for the sake of serving the public, and recognition of exemplary work helps to maintain office morale. Positive socializing, praise, and recognition should be core components of office life, as well as clarifying opportunities for advancement. When promotions and opportunities for advancement are limited by budgets or staffing shortages, then awards, congratulatory emails, and phone calls can provide meaningful recognition without significant expense. One office has a popular program where staff can nominate their colleagues for regular recognition events.<sup>3</sup>

## Positive Social Interaction

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Positive social activities during and after work hours, such as potluck office lunches, gym memberships, sport teams, and community events are “work perks” consistently associated with happy employees across disciplines.<sup>4</sup> Fostering healthy relationships and conversations between employees during work hours is

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<sup>3</sup> See Video from PCE Pop Up on Recruitment and Retention, Part 1, [“Promoting Your Office Culture as a Driver for Recruitment and Retention”](#), County Prosecutor Sherri Bevan Walsh, Summit County Prosecutor’s Office, Ohio.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.inc.com/darren-heitner/why-founders-are-promoting-sports-health-fitness-to-employees.html> (Last viewed October 2022)

helpful for those who are not able to participate in after-work activities. In an office where many staff are allowed to work from home, a comfortable area in the office has been created for people to gather and catch up.<sup>5</sup> This has helped to continue the collegiality and comradery that can be impacted by working from home.

## INTERVIEWING AND WORKING WITH INTERNS

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Interns are a wonderful source of future employees. Offices can benefit from interns in every employment category. Legal interns are always valuable, however, interns that assist the non-legal staff are also extremely helpful. A robust and organized internship program provides excellent assistance to an office and is a path to identifying talented future staff. Thus, the office should focus on making the intern experience as positive as possible.



### Initial Interview to Convey Office Culture

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It is vital to remember that an office interview is a preview of its culture. Interns and new graduates are socially conscious and dislike behavior that reinforces power inequities. Interviewers should treat all applicants with respect, regardless

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<sup>5</sup> See Video from PCE Pop Up on Recruitment and Retention, Part 1, [“Work from Home Policy”](#), County Attorney Shiela Polk, Yavapai County Attorney’s Office, Arizona.

of their performance. While a poorly performing candidate may not be hired, if they are treated poorly in an interview, they may share that information with others who will steer clear of an office they perceive as having a toxic culture. In a recent interview with a current law student, the student shared an experience where a prosecutor ate a sandwich during a candidate interview. That conveyed a lack of respect for the applicant and the process. The high-performing candidate declined an internship offer, citing concerns over office culture.

## Creating a Welcoming Environment

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Early interactions with office staff, interview panelists, background investigators, and supervisors make lasting impressions on prospective prosecutors. Thus, the staff should be alerted to the importance of welcoming all new people into an office, including interns. It is important to remember that one bad experience can color the way an entire law school class looks at an office and its reputation. All employees need to understand they are ambassadors for the office brand. If morale in the office is low, this will be quickly conveyed to new staff. On the other hand, interns who enjoy their work experience will see the office as part of their future.

Those responsible for an internship program need to be aware that generational differences can lead to a lack of interaction between new and more experienced employees. It can be intimidating for a law student or new hires to seek advice from experienced staff who they perceive as above them in the office hierarchy. Making sure that experienced staff understand their role in reflecting office culture and creating a welcoming environment is critical. This positive interaction with experienced staff also provides a foundational support system that new employees and interns can access when faced with work challenges.

One office distributes a list of interns with pictures and fun biographical information (that the intern is willing to share) to encourage conversations between employees at all levels who may not realize they have hobbies, musical tastes, or other things in common. That office also creates a treasure hunt that leads interns to meet senior staff, who are forewarned that interns will be seeking them out.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> See Video from PCE Pop Up on Recruitment and Retention, Part 2, "[Taking Internship Programming Up a Notch](#)", Chief Deputy District Attorney Nell Christensen, Clark County District Attorney's Office, Nevada. (Last viewed October 29, 2022).

## Keeping Interns Engaged

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In a busy office, it can be easy to overlook interns. They should be assigned to a mentor or coordinator who is responsible for overseeing their assignments. A list of tasks should be developed before interns arrive, so they are kept busy and have an opportunity to



observe interesting aspects of the office’s work. For example, an office can create a series of observations for an intern, so that they can spend a day with police, at a trial, at a local non-profit, with victim services, or attend a conference.

## Funding for Interns

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It is important to recognize that not everyone can work for free and providing paid internships will create more interest in a position. Some law schools offer credit for working with a non-profit or governmental organization and in some instances the schools have a stipend for summer work with a government agency. The head of the internship program should become familiar with these options and ask prospective interns if they have explored those possibilities. If the office does not have funding for interns, some token of gratitude, such as a gift card or a goodbye lunch, should be considered.

# MARKETING

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Prosecution work has much to offer a new graduate, but in the face of competing opportunities, it is imperative that prosecutors spread the word about their impact on social justice by helping victims, providing treatment to defendants, and developing innovative programs that support their community. The opportunity to be a trial lawyer working on exciting cases with cutting-edge

technology and forensics should also be highlighted. This requires consistent messaging through direct contact with students at law schools, information-sharing with law school career services professionals, broadcasting new initiatives to achieve equal justice through social media and the press, and providing access to the office through education programs for adults and children.

## Job Posting and Website

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The first thing to review is the office’s job posting and website to assess whether it is promoting the office in a way that is appealing to Gen Z applicants. An office can consider posting videos of testimonials from prior interns who have enjoyed the job.



## Prosecutor Ambassadors

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Recruitment efforts should be assigned to a prosecutor who can be a good ambassador for the interesting work and significant accomplishments of the office. Some offices with available resources have hired a recruitment specialist.

## Law School and College Outreach

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Prosecutors in jurisdictions with law schools and colleges should work with schools to develop courses that focus on the impact of prosecution work, the evolving role of the prosecutor, and cutting-edge strategies for solving cases.

- **Law School Class:** Prosecutors can advocate for prosecution classes or seminars in law schools. They can partner with other prosecutors’ offices to develop a class where prosecutor guest speakers can join. The New York Best Practices Committee, for example, worked with a local law school to develop a prosecution seminar, with members of the Committee serving as guest lecturers on such topics as ethics, conviction review, investigations, discovery, and crime strategy. Similar classes exist in other states, as well.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> See Video from PCE Pop Up on Recruitment and Retention, Part 2, “[Creating a Prosecutor Centered Law School Class](#)”, Executive Director Kristine Hamann, PCE. (Last viewed October 30, 2022).



- **DA Citizen Academy:** One office created a DA Academy for first year law students and affinity group organizations in the law schools with a program that includes lectures, visits with judges, discussion of prevention options, and a mock press conference.<sup>8</sup>
- **Mock Trials:** Encourage prosecutors in the office to participate in mock trials and moot court competitions that are sponsored by law schools, Bar Associations, and colleges. This is a place to identify talent and to start the recruitment process.
- **Alumni Involvement:** Have alumni who are currently working in a prosecutor office attend Criminal Law Society meetings or other events at their law school. They can credibly vouch for the office.
- **Relationship with Career Service Office:** The person with hiring responsibilities should reach out to law school career service professionals to see how prosecutors can have an on-campus presence. This can take many forms such as: employment information sessions, 1L writing clinics, or panel discussions on relevant legal issues.
- **Presentations:** Prosecutors should seek out opportunities to present information at events that include potential applicants, such as law school career fairs, affinity bar association groups, and national bar association meetings.




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<sup>8</sup> See Video from PCE Pop Up on Recruitment and Retention, Part 1, [“Outreach Program for New Law Students”](#) Assistant Chief of the Juvenile Division Shawanalyse Ochoa, San Diego County District Attorney’s Office. (Last viewed ??)

## Pre-College Outreach

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Offices should also consider longer-term recruitment strategies, leveraging relationships with local elementary and middle schools to introduce prosecution to young students. This outreach should involve age-appropriate presentations or activities focused on civic duties and public service. Mini-citizen academies for high school students are another excellent way to introduce the real work of the office, share student worker opportunities, and promote mentorships.



## Website and Social Media Outreach

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Websites and social media are key sources of information and job opportunities for Gen Z and Millennial applicants. The more stories are shared, and social media followers are engaged, the more likely young applicants are to understand the real scope of prosecution work and the positive impact it can have on community safety. This requires effort and willingness to adapt to new technology. Messaging targeted to Gen Z is essential to recruiting the prosecutors of tomorrow. Ideas include:

- **Website:** Maintain an updated website that highlights important policies, initiatives, and community programs.
- **Social Media:** Develop social media accounts and use them to broadcast interesting news from the office. Be sure to include a balance of crime-related news, community outreach efforts, educational pieces, and special office initiatives.
- **Job Postings:** Leverage national, state, and local bar associations and job seeker websites to advertise positions. Be aware that there are industry-specific websites focused on law student applicants. Local law schools may also have website-based job boards.

## Job Fairs

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Prosecutors should update their job descriptions to include topics of interest to Gen Z and Millennial applicants and then expand the scope of where the job can be posted.

- **Affinity Bar Associations** will often have local and national job fairs, which bring lawyers and law students to a central location where an office can staff a booth and pass out materials. For example, during their annual conference, the National Black Prosecutors Association has an excellent job fair that is open to all employers.<sup>9</sup>
- **State Bar Associations** host job fairs where an office can staff a booth and pass out materials.
- **Law Schools** may also play host to local employers, and offices should maintain contact with law school career services to be apprised of events where they can be included.



## Community Outreach

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Community outreach comes in many forms from education programs to street fairs. The goal of these events is to provide resources to the community and to explain the role of the prosecutor. Though not a direct recruiting tool, it will have ripple effects that benefit recruitment. Prosecutor outreach events can include:

- Citizen academies for adults and high school students that provide information about the criminal justice system.
- Hosting open house events for the community so they can see the office and meet staff.
- Creating opportunities for interns or staff to spend a day with a local non-profit.




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<sup>9</sup> See [National Black Prosecutors Association Website](#) for information about their job fair (Last viewed October 30, 2022).

## CONCLUSION

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Gen Z prosecutors will lead the criminal justice system of the future, but first they must be engaged and feel that their needs are met. Educating Gen Z about the role of prosecutors in seeking justice, trying cases, and serving victims is an important step. Sharing information about impactful programs that prevent crime and aid in rehabilitation while highlighting community partnerships can address Gen Z's desire for meaningful social impact. Job security and student loan benefit information provide significant incentives for young lawyers. Finally, prosecutors need to emphasize an office culture that is committed to healthy work relationships and work-life balance. This approach will recruit talented new lawyers and have a positive impact on existing staff. New lawyers will remain in the office when they see the rewarding, exciting, and impactful work done in a prosecutor office.