

Process Server Rate Guide 2026

Real pricing data — per-serve fees, rush charges, and hidden costs across all 50 states

- ✓ Standard and rush service fees by state and metro area
- ✓ Skip tracing, stakeout, and special service charges
- ✓ Hidden fees to watch for (mileage, attempts, affidavit, notary)
- ✓ How to negotiate better rates with process servers and agencies

How Process Server Billing Works

Process server billing is straightforward but can vary significantly by jurisdiction, difficulty, and urgency. Most servers charge a flat per-serve fee, but the final cost depends on how many attempts are needed, whether skip tracing is required, and how urgently the documents must be served. Understanding the billing structure is the first step to controlling costs.

Billing Structure Overview

Component	Description	Typical Range
Standard service fee	Flat fee for routine personal service at a known address	\$50-\$150
Rush / same-day service	Priority service within 24 hours	\$75-\$250
Additional attempt fee	Per-attempt charge after the first attempt	\$20-\$50 per attempt
Skip tracing	Locating a person when address is unknown or stale	\$50-\$250
Mileage / travel	Travel beyond standard service area	\$0.50-\$0.67/mile
Affidavit of service / proof of service	Required court filing documenting service	Often included; \$15-\$50 if separate

Quick Budget Reference

- Routine personal service (known address, metro area): \$65-\$125
- Rush service (same-day or next-day): \$100-\$250
- Skip trace + serve (address unknown): \$150-\$400
- Stakeout service (evasive defendant): \$200-\$500+
- Out-of-state service (coordinated through local server): \$75-\$200+ per jurisdiction

Standard Rates by State & Metro Area

What Process Servers Charge — State by State

Process server fees vary by state based on local licensing requirements, competition, cost of living, and court rules. Urban markets tend to be more expensive due to traffic, parking, and density challenges.

State / Metro	Standard Serve	Rush (Same-Day)	Key Notes
New York City	\$100-\$200	\$150-\$300	NYC requires DCWP license; highest urban rates
Los Angeles / San Francisco	\$85-\$175	\$125-\$275	High traffic; parking costs; large geographic spread
Chicago / Illinois	\$65-\$125	\$100-\$200	Moderate market; Cook County competitive
Washington, DC	\$85-\$150	\$125-\$250	Government-heavy; strict security protocols
Miami / South Florida	\$60-\$100	\$90-\$175	Competitive market; gated communities add difficulty
Houston / Dallas / Texas	\$65-\$120	\$100-\$200	State certification required (JBCC); growing market
Phoenix / Arizona	\$60-\$110	\$90-\$175	State registration + exam required
Atlanta / Georgia	\$50-\$100	\$85-\$150	No state licensing; competitive pricing
Denver / Colorado	\$60-\$110	\$95-\$175	Moderate market
Midwest / Rural	\$40-\$85	\$75-\$125	Lowest cost markets; longer travel distances
National average	\$65-\$125	\$100-\$200	Varies widely by difficulty and location

Sheriff vs. Private Server

In many states, the county sheriff serves civil process for \$25-\$75 (often the cheapest option). However, sheriff service is slower (2-6 weeks), provides no skip tracing, and offers limited attempt schedules. Private servers cost more but complete service faster (1-5 days) with more attempts.

Special Service Types & Pricing

Service Type	Typical Fee	Description
Personal service (standard)	\$50-\$150	Hand-delivery to named individual
Substituted service	\$65-\$175	Delivery to a person of suitable age/discretion at dwelling
Service on a business entity	\$50-\$150	Delivery to registered agent, officer, or managing agent
Posting / nail-and-mail	\$50-\$125	Affixing to door + mailing copy; used after failed personal attempts
Service by publication	\$150-\$500+	Legal notice in newspaper; used when defendant cannot be located
Skip tracing (basic)	\$50-\$125	Database searches (Accurant, TLO, IRB) for current address
Skip tracing (advanced)	\$125-\$250+	Field investigation, social media monitoring, neighborhood canvass
Stakeout / surveillance service	\$50-\$75/hr	Waiting at location for evasive defendant; billed hourly
Process server affidavit	\$0-\$50	Sworn proof of service; often included in base fee
Notarization	\$1-\$15	Per signature; state-regulated fees
Court filing	\$25-\$75	Filing proof of service with the court
Foreign service (Hague Convention)	\$500-\$2,000+	International service through Central Authority; 3-12 months
Service on federal agency	\$75-\$200	Must comply with FRCP 4(i); service on U.S. Attorney + agency

Hidden Fees & Add-Ons

Always get a flat all-inclusive quote upfront. Some servers advertise low base rates but add fees for attempts, mileage, affidavits, and filing separately. Budget 20-40% above the quoted base fee for a realistic total.

Add-On	Typical Cost	When It Applies
Additional attempt fee (2nd, 3rd attempt)	\$20-\$50 each	Most serves require 2-3 attempts before success
Mileage / travel surcharge	\$0.50-\$0.67/mile	Travel beyond standard service area (typically 25-mile radius)
Weekend / holiday service	+\$25-\$75	Service required outside business hours
Gated community access fee	+\$25-\$50	Additional time/effort navigating restricted access
Stakeout / wait time	\$50-\$75/hr	Waiting for an evasive defendant to appear
Return of unserved documents	\$15-\$30	Physical return of papers after failed service
Detailed service notes / photos	\$25-\$50	GPS-stamped photos, detailed descriptions of attempts
Court filing of affidavit	\$25-\$75	Filing proof of service with the court
Expedited affidavit	\$25-\$50	Same-day or next-day completion of service declaration
Agency markup on server fee	25-50%	National agencies add overhead above local server's rate
Rush / priority placement	+25-100%	Same-day or next-day assignment
Due diligence declaration	\$50-\$100	Detailed affidavit of all attempts for "service by publication" motion

Ask for an "all-in, flat-rate quote" that includes up to 3 attempts, standard mileage, and the affidavit of service. Compare flat-rate quotes from 2-3 servers — pricing variation within the same metro area can be 40-60%.

How to Negotiate Better Rates

Numbered list

- 1 Compare agency vs. independent server.** National agencies (ABC Legal, ServeNow, Proof) add 25-50% markup over the local server's rate. For routine service, hiring a local independent server directly saves 25-40%.
- 2 Provide accurate addresses upfront.** Verified, current addresses reduce failed attempts. Each additional attempt adds \$20-50. Pre-validate addresses using skip trace databases before assigning service.
- 3 Bundle multiple serves.** Servers in the same geographic area will discount 10-20% for batched assignments (e.g., 5 serves in the same county).
- 4 Use sheriff service for non-urgent matters.** County sheriffs charge \$25-75 per serve — often 50-70% less than private servers. Trade-off: slower completion (2-6 weeks) and fewer attempt options.
- 5 Avoid rush fees when possible.** Same-day service costs 50-100% more than standard. Unless the statute of limitations is imminent, standard 3-5 day service is significantly cheaper.
- 6 Negotiate volume contracts.** Firms with regular process service needs can negotiate 15-25% discounts on retainer agreements with local servers.
- 7 Get GPS-stamped proof included.** Some servers charge \$25-50 extra for GPS-stamped photos and detailed notes. Negotiate this into the flat rate — it's your protection against defective service claims.
- 8 Skip trace first, serve second.** Don't pay for 3-4 failed attempts at an old address. Invest \$50-125 in skip tracing upfront and serve at the confirmed current address.
- 9 Use substituted or posting service strategically.** After 2-3 failed personal service attempts, substituted service or posting (where allowed) is cheaper than indefinite attempts.
- 10 Get three quotes.** Pricing variation within the same market can be 40-60%. Always compare at least 2-3 providers.

Budget Planning Worksheet

Use this worksheet to estimate total service of process costs. Print and fill in for each case.

Line Item	Estimated Cost	Actual Cost
Standard service fee (per defendant)	\$ _____	\$ _____
Number of defendants x rate	\$ _____	\$ _____
Rush / priority surcharge	\$ _____	\$ _____
Skip tracing (if address unknown)	\$ _____	\$ _____
Additional attempts (est. x \$30 each)	\$ _____	\$ _____
Mileage / travel surcharge	\$ _____	\$ _____
Stakeout time (if evasive defendant)	\$ _____	\$ _____
Weekend / after-hours surcharge	\$ _____	\$ _____
Affidavit of service (if not included)	\$ _____	\$ _____
Court filing of proof of service	\$ _____	\$ _____
Out-of-state coordination (if applicable)	\$ _____	\$ _____
20% contingency buffer	\$ _____	\$ _____
TOTAL ESTIMATED	\$ _____	\$ _____

Complete this worksheet before requesting quotes. Knowing the number of defendants, their locations, and whether addresses are verified lets you get accurate all-in pricing.

CTA box

Want a quick sanity check on your numbers? Email this worksheet to contact@servecircuit.com or browse verified process servers at servecircuit.com

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