

1.03 | QUESTION 3: DOES THE FEDERAL DISTRICT COURT HAVE JURISDICTION TO HEAR MY CLAIM?

The United States District Court is a federal trial court. Federal courts have “jurisdiction,” meaning the legal authority, to hear only certain types of cases. As is the case in all federal trial courts, a federal district court is generally authorized only to hear cases that fall into the following four categories:

1. Those that deal with a question involving the United States Constitution;
2. Those that involve questions of federal law (as opposed to state law, unless there is a state law claim related to a federal claim being made, in which case the court may agree to consider it);
3. Those that involve the United States as a party, whether as a plaintiff or defendant;
4. Those that involve a dispute among residents of different states with an amount in controversy exceeding \$75,000.²

If your case does not fall under any of these categories, you should not file it in a federal district court.

(Federal Bar Association: Access to Justice Task Force. © 2019.

Honorable Mention: USNYND, USCAND)

Footnotes

² It is important to note that in cases invoking diversity jurisdiction with multiple defendants or multiple plaintiffs, no single defendant can be a resident of the same state as any single plaintiff.

