



## **Citizens Jury Project Report December 2007**

### **Summary**

During the first three weeks of December 2007, the Citizens Jury Project (CJP) of the Fund for Modern Courts operated Ombudservice booths in nine (9) courthouse locations in New York City for six to twelve hours per week.<sup>1</sup> The primary goal of CJP interns is to provide assistance to jurors and improve the juror experience. In December, 348 jurors approached the booths with 349 questions or comments.<sup>2</sup>

This report identifies common questions asked and comments made to CJP at each site, along with suggestions for improvement where appropriate, and a set of general recommendations.

Inquiries about the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse were the most common juror questions at six (6) CJP sites during the first three weeks of December 2007. At three (3) CJP sites, the questions asked most frequently concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do.

### **General Recommendations:**

1. **Updated Signage or Guides:** Modern state-of-the-art signage using visually-familiar icons would benefit many jurors. Signage should be located in frequently-trafficked areas.<sup>3</sup>
2. **Post Instructions and Distribute Information:** Posters featuring diagrams and instructions for completing the juror questionnaire would benefit jurors. Posters should be displayed in juror lounges and in the general assembly areas. CJP is preparing a draft of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) for each courthouse, to address common questions about procedures (e.g. where jurors are permitted to use their cell phones) for OCA approval. Interns also will refer jurors to the Petit Juror Handbook and [nyjuror.gov](http://nyjuror.gov) which have FAQ sections.

## New York County

**60 Centre Street:** During the first three weeks of December, the CJP Ombudservice booth was approached by 47 jurors with 47 questions and comments. The most common questions concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (21 inquiries).<sup>4</sup> The next most frequently asked questions concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do (11).<sup>5</sup> **Recommendation:** *See General Recommendations 1 and 2 at the beginning of this report. Directional signs should be placed inside the general assembly room by the clerk's desk and by the elevators. Instructional signs should be placed inside the general assembly room by the clerk's desk and in juror lounges.*

**100 Centre Street:** During the first three weeks of December, 72 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 72 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (36).<sup>6</sup> The next most frequently asked questions concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do (19).<sup>7</sup> **Recommendation:** *See General Recommendations 1 and 2 at the beginning of this report. Directional signs should be placed inside the general assembly room by the entrance (where reading materials are offered) and outside the general assembly room by the CJP Ombudservice booth. Instructional signs should be placed inside the general assembly room by the clerk's desk and in juror lounges.*

**111 Centre Street, 3<sup>rd</sup> floor:** During the first three weeks of December, 12 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 12 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (6).<sup>8</sup> **Recommendation:** *See General Recommendation 1 at the beginning of this report. Directional signs should be placed outside the general assembly room.*

**111 Centre Street, 11<sup>th</sup> floor:** During the first three weeks of December, the CJP Ombudservice booth addressed comments from 11 jurors, who approached with 11 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (5).<sup>9</sup> The second most frequently asked questions concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do (3).<sup>10</sup> **Recommendation:** *See General Recommendations 1 and 2 at the beginning of this report. Directional signs should be placed outside the general assembly room. Instructional signs should be placed inside the general assembly room by the clerks' desk and in juror lounges.*

## **Kings County**

**320 Jay Street:** During the first three weeks of December, 45 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth and raised 45 questions and comments. Eighteen (18) questions concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do.<sup>11</sup> Twelve (12) jurors asked questions about the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse.<sup>12</sup> **Recommendation:** *See General Recommendations 1 and 2 at the beginning of this report. Instructional signs should be placed inside the general assembly room by the clerks' desk and in the juror lounge. Directional signs should be placed outside the general assembly room and by the elevators.*

**360 Adams Street:** During the first three weeks of December, 69 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 69 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do (31).<sup>13</sup> The second most frequently asked question concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (17).<sup>14</sup> **Recommendation:** *See General Recommendations 1 and 2 at the beginning of this report. Directional signs should be placed outside the general assembly room. Instructional signs should be placed inside the general assembly room by the clerk's desk and in the juror lounge.*

## **Bronx County**

During the first three weeks of December, 70 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 70 questions and comments. The most common questions (34) concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse.<sup>15</sup> There were nineteen (19) late jurors who approached interns.<sup>16</sup> **Recommendation:** *See General Recommendation 1 at the beginning of this report. Directional signs should be placed inside the general assembly room along the side of the room and directly outside the jury room by the CJP Ombudservice booth. Bronx County should consider a dedicated entrance for jurors who are often detained in the general security line.*

## **Queens County**

**Kew Gardens:** During the first three weeks of December, 9 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 10 questions and comments. The most common questions (5) concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse.<sup>17</sup> **Recommendation:** *See General Recommendation 1 at the beginning of this report. Directional signs should be placed outside the general assembly room.*

**Jamaica:** During the first three weeks of December, CJP interns recorded 14 questions and comments from 14 jurors. Questions about procedure and what jurors could/were required to do were the most frequently asked question at this location (6).<sup>18</sup>

**Recommendation:** *See General Recommendation 2 at the beginning of this report. Instructional signs should be placed inside the general assembly room by the clerk's desk and in the juror lounge.*

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<sup>1</sup> Booths are generally in operation from 9 a.m. to 12 noon, three days per week; the Bronx booth is operated two days per week. Booths were not open during the final two weeks of December due to the holidays and intern unavailability.

<sup>2</sup> Relative to November, there was a sharp decline in the number of comments received due to the holiday recess.

<sup>3</sup> CJP has been informed that the 2007-2008 OCA budget requests include signage for each facility in NYC. CJP has been invited "to do a walk through" with OCA representatives when OCA begins its review, probably in late April.

<sup>4</sup> The following are examples of this type of question: "Where is the men's restroom?" and "Jury room here?" Interns provided directions to jurors.

<sup>5</sup> Questions of this type included: "We can use the cellphone here right?"; "Can I bring tea into the jury panel room?"; "What time do we get out for lunch and when can we leave?"; and "Why only civil cases? Can I switch?"

<sup>6</sup> The following are examples of this type of question: "Where can I buy cigarettes?"; "Where is the computer room?"; and "Where can I buy a newspaper?" Interns provided directions to jurors.

<sup>7</sup> Questions of this type included: "Where do I go after I come back from questioning?"; "What time is lunch?"; and "Today is my second day here. What do I do?"

<sup>8</sup> Questions concerning location included: "Where can I find a Deli around here?" and "Where is the bathroom?" Interns provided directions to jurors.

<sup>9</sup> Questions concerning location included: "Where is the bathroom?" and "Where can I get a cup of coffee?" Interns provided directions to jurors.

<sup>10</sup> An example of a question concerning procedure included: "Can I use my cell phone here?" Intern advised juror where cell phone use was permitted.

<sup>11</sup> Examples of questions concerning procedure included: "Do I have to come back after lunch? and "May I leave if the judge already excused me?" Interns explained procedures to jurors and provided additional direction where needed.

<sup>12</sup> Questions concerning location included: "Where are the vending machines?" and "Where are the drinks?" Interns provided directions to jurors.

<sup>13</sup> Examples of questions concerning procedure included: "Do I have to stay until 5 pm?" and "Where do I hand this in to get credit for serving?" Interns explained procedures to jurors and provided additional direction where needed.

<sup>14</sup> Questions in this category included the following: "Where can I go for a small snack?" and "Where are the elevators?" Interns provided directions to jurors.

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<sup>15</sup> Questions in this category included: “How do you get to room 313?” and “Is there somewhere I can get coffee?” Interns provided directions to jurors.

<sup>16</sup> The following is an example of a comment made by a late juror: “I was supposed to be here by 10:30 today but I got held up by the security lines...should I just go up to the courtroom?” Intern advised juror to proceed to the assembly room.

<sup>17</sup> An example of a question concerning location included: “Where is the bathroom?” Intern provided directions to juror.

<sup>18</sup> Questions concerning procedure included: “What kind of questions will they ask up on the panel?” and “I need help with my questionnaire. I don't understand English that well. I only speak Spanish.” Interns explained procedures to jurors and provided additional direction where needed.