



Citizens Jury Project Report June 2008

Summary

In June of 2008, 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.¹ The primary goal of CJP interns is to provide assistance to jurors and improve the juror experience. In June, 630 jurors approached the booths (or used the virtual ombudservice online), with 699 questions or comments.

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 five (5) CJP sites in June of 2008.² At four (4) sites, questions about procedure and what jurors could/were required to do were the most frequently asked.

General Recommendation and Note:

Recommendation: Computer Instructions - Some jurors need instructions about how to fully utilize the computers (e.g. how to move from the OCA webpage to another site, etc.) With this report, CJP has prepared a brief set of instructions that can be displayed near computers. The steps are basic, and displaying them would enhance the juror experience.

Note: Procedure - Many questions that interns are asked concern procedure and what jurors can and are required to do.³ As the questions do not vary greatly from location to location, or from month to month, CJP will not set out examples by courthouse in this report.

New York County

60 Centre Street: During June, the CJP Ombudservice booth was approached by 71 jurors with 73 questions and comments. The most common questions concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (31). Sixteen (16) jurors asked questions regarding procedure and what jurors could/were required to do. Five (5) questions had to do with postponements and/or difficulty with serving.

100 Centre Street: During June, 89 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 102 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (46). Sixteen (16) jurors asked questions regarding procedure and what jurors could/were required to do. There were seven (7) appreciative comments.⁴

111 Centre Street, 3rd floor: During June, 23 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 25 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do (8). Five (5) questions concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse.

111 Centre Street, 11th floor: During June, the CJP Ombudservice booth addressed comments from 126 jurors, who approached with 131 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do (34). There also were thirty-two (32) questions concerning the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse. Twelve (12) questions had to do with postponements and/or difficulty with serving. There were also eleven (11) suggestions.⁵

Kings County

320 Jay Street: During June, 40 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth and raised 41 questions and comments. The most common questions by far concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do (20). Five (5) questions had to do with postponements and/or difficulty with serving.

360 Adams Street: During June, 50 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 50 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (21). There were also fifteen (15) questions concerning procedure and what jurors could/were required to do.

Bronx County

During June, 55 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 70 questions and comments. The most common questions (37) concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse. There were three (3) complaints about *all* of the computers not working; an intern reports that most computers are now operational, though several still are not. CJP also notes that the listing of new phone numbers for the courthouse has been corrected on nyjuror.gov.

Queens County

Kew Gardens: During June, CJP interns recorded 152 questions and comments from 138 jurors. The most common questions (69) concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse. There were also twenty-eight (28) questions concerning procedure and what jurors could/were required to do.

Jamaica: During June, CJP interns recorded 52 questions and comments from 43 jurors. The most common questions (12) concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do. Eleven (11) questions concerned the use of computers.

¹ While booths are generally in operation from 9 a.m. to 12 noon, three days per week, there are exceptions. In the Bronx, jurors are called twice each week, and so the booth there is operated two days per week. In Brooklyn, interns arrive after the court's orientation (as requested by court personnel). Interns work until lunch time, when most or all jurors leave the courthouse. Lunchtime varies, but often begins before 1 pm. Additionally, interns occasionally report that jurors have been discharged early, meaning, of course, that there is no one left to approach them.

² Examples of questions about location include: "Where can I get lunch/coffee/a newspaper?"; "Where are the restrooms/water fountains/elevators?" and "Where is the subway/post office?" Because the questions do not vary greatly from location to location, or from month to month, CJP has not reported examples by courthouse in this report.

³ Questions regarding procedure and what jurors can and are required to do often include "Can I leave? Is there a sign-out sheet?"; "When is lunch?"; "Can I use my cell phone/smoke/eat here?"; "How long does jury service last?"; and "Will I get something proving I served?"

⁴ Appreciative comments included, "The supervisor of the jury pool was excellent, patient and careful of the time of those in his charge."; "This place is well maintained and everything went smoothly. All of the personnel were considerate."; "You made it as pleasant as possible and not just because we were dismissed early, but because the personnel are very nice."; "The staff does a great job - relaxing, efficient - all the clerks and Larry are very professional."; and "I was here yesterday - the judge was very nice. He explained everything."

⁵ Suggestions included "[You should be able to] call in for jury duty in Manhattan like [you can] in Queens."; "Use the money of \$40 a day having people sitting around to perform a best practice study on court procedure. Focus on federal courts and states with the most efficient methodologies. Use more technology and see if there can be a real assessment of need prior to reporting- as part of the above 'best practices.'"; "It would be good if you could choose your days and give them lots of notice, instead of them picking arbitrary days for you."; and "Maybe the requirements for jury duty should be on the actual summons. For example, jury duty is a minimum of two days."