



**Citizens Jury Project Report  
April 2008**

**Summary**

In April 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.<sup>1</sup> The primary goal of CJP interns is to provide assistance to jurors and improve the juror experience. In April, 437 jurors approached the booths (or used the virtual ombudservice online), with 452 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 seven (7) CJP sites in April of 2008.<sup>2</sup> At the remaining two sites, questions about procedure and what jurors could/were required to do were the most frequently asked.

**General Recommendations and Note:**

***Recommendation: Notifying Manhattan Jurors of Two-Day Minimum Commitment*** – Interns operating booths in Manhattan relate that jurors frequently say that they were unaware that they would be required to serve for at least two days. Providing this information (or making it more prominent) on the summons and [nyjuror.gov](http://nyjuror.gov) website would help to alert jurors about what to expect before arriving at the courthouse.

***Recommendation: Additional programming*** – A juror suggested, and CJP agrees that OCA and courthouses should consider showing programs regarding the history of the jury system, in addition to the orientation video. As the juror pointed out, such programming would be entertaining and educational, hopefully giving jurors a greater sense of the importance of the judicial system.

***Recommendation: Notification about the Availability of Wifi*** – OCA and the courts has done an excellent job in providing Wifi access for jurors. However, as revealed by the recent CJP Wifi survey, many jurors do not know of this valuable service before coming to the courthouse, and so cannot avail themselves of it. Therefore, providing this information (or

making it more prominent) on the summons and the nyjuror.gov website would be very useful.

**Recommendation: “Red Light – Green Light” System** – A juror suggested—and many others who heard the idea enthusiastically agreed—that placing a red light/green light in hallways outside juror assembly rooms would benefit jurors. The purpose would be to alert jurors via a green light when they must return to the assembly room if they are outside the assembly room. If the red light is on, jurors would know they could remain outside the assembly room. A single colored “Green Light” System could play the same role; when lit, jurors would be required to reenter the assembly room. Either system would provide an alternative where speakers are needed, but are not available. **Related Recommendation:** Signs should be posted indicating where audio speakers are located and can be heard. A frequent question asked of interns this month was “Can I hear my name being called in the hallway/bathroom/etc.?”

**Recommendation: Computer Instructions** - Some jurors need instructions about how to fully utilize the computers (i.e. changing webpages from OCA to another web site, etc.) CJP would be happy to prepare brief instructions that could be displayed near computers.

**Recommendation: Bicycle Racks** – With the improving weather, courthouses should consider whether additional bicycle racks can be made available for jurors. Signs should clearly indicate where racks are located, and jurors should be made aware of the availability of such accommodations before coming to serve.<sup>3</sup>

**Note: Procedure** - Many questions that interns are asked concern procedure and what jurors can and are required to do.<sup>4</sup> 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 April, the CJP Ombudservice booth was approached by 57 jurors with 57 questions and comments. The most common questions concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (22 inquiries). Fourteen (14) jurors asked questions regarding procedure and what jurors could/were required to do.

**100 Centre Street:** During April, 156 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 158 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (100). Twenty-eight (28) jurors asked questions regarding procedure and what jurors could/were required to do. Additionally there were seven (7) appreciative comments.<sup>5</sup> In our March CJP report, we noted that an intern had observed that computers are slow, and that some of the keys stick (so that if someone pressed the letter “j” it might appear as “jjjjjjjjjjjjjj”). OCA has informed CJP that there is a work order to fix this problem.

**111 Centre Street, 3<sup>rd</sup> floor:** During April, 18 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 18 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (15).

**111 Centre Street, 11<sup>th</sup> floor:** During April, the CJP Ombudservice booth addressed comments from 42 jurors, who approached with 43 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (14). There were also twelve (12) questions concerning procedure and what jurors could/were required to do. Additionally, there were three (3) appreciative comments.<sup>6</sup>

### **Kings County**

**320 Jay Street:** During April, 13 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth and raised 13 questions and comments. The most common questions concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do (8).

**360 Adams Street:** During April, 54 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 54 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do (27). Additionally, there were three (3) appreciative comments.<sup>7</sup> CJP reported in March that a number of the computers were frozen or otherwise not working. Court personnel have informed CJP that this problem has been fixed.

### **Bronx County**

During April, 71 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 73 questions and comments. The most common questions (49) concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse. There were eleven (11) questions regarding procedure and what jurors could/were required to do. Last month, CJP reported an intern finding (as part of the facility review project) that of forty plus computers available for jurors, only twelve were working. OCA has informed CJP that there is a work order to fix this problem. At the time of writing this report, the CJP intern had returned to review the facilities and found that of thirty-nine (39) computers only three (3) were working; thirty-four (34) were on but frozen; and two (2) were turned off.

### **Queens County**

**Kew Gardens:** During April, CJP interns recorded 15 questions and comments from 6 jurors. The most common questions (9) concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse.

**Jamaica:** During April, CJP interns recorded 20 questions and comments from 20 jurors. The most common questions (6) concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse. Three (3) appreciative comments were received.<sup>8</sup> One juror made a recommendation supportive of CJP activities.<sup>9</sup>

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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.

<sup>2</sup> 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

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greatly from location to location, or from month to month, CJP has not reported examples by courthouse in this report.

<sup>3</sup> OCA informed CJP that the provision of additional bicycle racks has been referred to the City since the City owns the buildings.

<sup>4</sup> 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?”

<sup>5</sup> Appreciative comments included: “I think this gentleman (Larry) is terrific.”; “The clerk at 100 Centre Street is great!”; “Better than about 4 years ago - Last time I was here it wasn't comfortable - make us wait for a long time - Now it is much better comparing to before.”; “Help is upbeat, much more positive, Wifi is a nice addition. Compared to the last time I came, it is better.”; “I was on jury duty 5 years ago – it was very unpleasant because of people who worked here – It seems that it has become a pleasant experience – A lot nicer to do it – We were treated poorly before- would become angry – You want to do your duty without being mistreated – The personnel have more respect for jurors – Larry seems to be more caring.”; and “Good over all experience. Larry made us feel like a team and was very informative.”

<sup>6</sup> Appreciative comments included: “So much improved since 15 or 20 years ago. There are bright spaces, not depressing at all.”

<sup>7</sup> Appreciative comments included: “It is nice they have computers in the courtroom.”; “The pictures on the walls are really nice... It is much better for the public to have two rooms.” and “The women's bathrooms are kept neat and clean and they have a sign that states [to] keep it clean.”

<sup>8</sup> Appreciative comments included: “I am extremely satisfied with the services the court has offered, especially the computers. Also, I think the court officer is very helpful.” [Note: Juror was referring to Court Officer Roger.]; “I am enjoying the movie the court officer put on.” and “The court officer at the front desk is very nice. I like how he explains the jury duty procedure.”

<sup>9</sup> The juror said “What do you do? Your booth is so hidden!” After the intern gave the juror a detailed description of what CJP does, the juror made a recommendation that the booth should be more visible. CJP recognizes the difficulty of placing the booth elsewhere in the assembly room. However, the question and comment suggest that additional announcements concerning CJP – *and what interns are there to do* – would benefit jurors.