



**Citizens Jury Project Report  
August 2007  
Summary**

In August 2007, the Citizens Jury Project (CJP) of the Fund for Modern Courts operated Ombudservice Booths in seven courthouse locations in New York City, in order to provide assistance to jurors and improve the juror experience.<sup>i</sup> During this period, 302 jurors approached CJP with 359 questions or comments; the number of jurors reporting at all courthouse locations was 13,089.<sup>ii</sup> The booths were staffed by trained interns from six to twelve hours in the mornings each week.

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 facilities and amenities (restrooms, food and beverages, etc.) or particular rooms or offices within the courthouse were the most common juror questions at three (3) CJP sites in August 2007. At a fourth courthouse, Jamaica, out of thirteen (13) comments, seven (7) were appreciative ones. At a fifth, 111 Centre, 11<sup>th</sup> Fl., there also was significant positive feedback from jurors. At a sixth, 320 Jay Street, the largest number of questions concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do. At the last courthouse, Kew Gardens, only a single juror approached an intern.

**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.

2. **Additional information on procedure, and on what jurors can, and are required to do:** There will always be jurors who arrive late and ask where to go and what to do. Others may not listen carefully during orientation. CJP recognizes that court orientations are thorough, and is not offering a criticism here, but rather a suggestion. Additional information, perhaps on the nyjuror website, and in booklet form (or, maybe as a handout to supplement the *Petit Juror's Handbook*), might answer many juror questions (i.e., Where can I eat? Smoke? Use my cell phone? Can I go outside? What time is lunch? What can I expect to happen today?) While clerks provide most or all of the answers to these questions, additional ways of informing jurors about common procedures might be useful. CJP will draft a brief handout for OCA review that answers such questions for each courthouse.

### New York County

**60 Centre Street:** In August of 2007, the CJP Ombudservice Booth was approached by 69 jurors with 77 questions and comments. The most common questions concerned the location of facilities and amenities or particular rooms or offices within the courthouse (30 inquiries). Again, this month, there were fourteen (14) appreciative comments.<sup>1</sup> **Recommendation:** *Consider commendation to courthouse staff for positive service. See General Recommendation 1, at the beginning of this report.*

**100 Centre Street:** In August of 2007, 55 jurors approached the Ombudservice Booth with 65 questions and comments. The most frequent questions concerned the location of facilities and amenities or particular rooms or offices within the courthouse (36). Five (5) questions concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do.<sup>2</sup> **Recommendation:** *See General Recommendations 1 and 2, at the beginning of this report.*

**111 Centre Street, 3<sup>rd</sup> floor:** No jurors called in August.

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<sup>1</sup> Appreciative comments from jurors included the following: One juror said, "Staff was more polite and helpful than sometimes in the past. Facilities were cleaner. I appreciated the internet access. This time was a better experience. Probably only 2 days of service would have been required, but only 1 1/2 were needed!" Others told interns, ""It was as painless as it could be."; "It was a great experience - well organized." "We are treated with dignity and respect" and, "I found the process to be handled in a very professional manner. Starting with the notification by mail, the pre-night phone call and the entire registration phase - all went smoothly. I thought the court personnel were well trained [and] informative."

<sup>2</sup> Juror questions about procedure included: "What do they do after they stop talking?"; "How long until they start calling us?"; "My grandfather doesn't speak English, What should I do?"; and, "What do they do with regards to payment for people who are serving on their day off from work."

**111 Centre Street, 11<sup>th</sup> floor:** In August of 2007, the CJP Ombudservice spoke with 39 jurors, who approached with 47 questions and comments. There were eleven (11) complaints,<sup>3</sup> many of them unrelated to the courthouse or personnel.<sup>4</sup> Next, there were ten (10) questions about the location of facilities and amenities or particular rooms or offices within the courthouse. There were also six (6) appreciative comments.<sup>5</sup> **Recommendation:** *See General Recommendation 1, at the beginning of this report.*

### **Kings County**

**320 Jay Street:** In August of 2007, 49 jurors approached the booth and raised 55 questions and comments. Twenty-one (21) questions concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do.<sup>6</sup> There were nine (9) questions regarding postponements and difficulty with jury service.<sup>7</sup> Seven (7) late jurors approached interns asking where to go and what to do. Notably, there were only two (2) complaints. **Recommendation:** *See General Recommendation 2, at the beginning of this report.*

### **Bronx County**

In August of 2007, 80 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice Booth with 101 questions and comments. The most common questions (52) concerned the location of facilities and amenities or particular rooms or offices within the courthouse. Fifteen (15) questions concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do.<sup>8</sup> **Recommendation:** *See General Recommendations 1 and 2, at the beginning of this report.*

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<sup>3</sup> Two examples were: “I was here yesterday and thought that the whole process took too long. We had no idea what was going on for the longest time.”; “There are too many people here. I don’t like it. I feel claustrophobic.”

<sup>4</sup> These complaints included: “I cannot afford to take any time from work.”; “I think jury duty is time consuming, not that I don’t want to serve.”; “I am bored out of my mind. I should not be forced to be here.”; “It is ridiculous for freelance people to be here when they loose so much money.”; and “They pay us too little.”

<sup>5</sup> Some of the appreciative comments: “I like the room, the clerks, and the court. . .”; “I really enjoy my experience here. I served 7 yrs ago and can attest to the improvements of the court.”

<sup>6</sup> Amongst the questions about procedure were: Juror asked if/where she could use her cell phone; juror lost the summons; juror asked when voir dire would end; juror asked, “What is all the wait for? How long do we have to be here?”; and, juror asked about the hours of the court and what would happen next.

<sup>7</sup> Several jurors said they had health and medical reasons that caused them to raise the issue of postponing service. One juror said he needed to move. Another was on vacation, and wanted to postpone. A juror with a Friday appointment was wondering if she should stay (question asked on a Wednesday) In each case, jurors were directed to the clerks.

<sup>8</sup> Juror questions about procedure included: “What do I do?” (late jurors); “What do I do with this (summons)?”; “Can I sit outside the jury room?”; “My father received a jury duty questionnaire but doesn’t speak English - what do I do?”; and, “Can I go out for a cigarette or are they going to call my name?”

## Queens County

**Kew Gardens:** In August of 2007, CJP staff recorded only 1 question or comment from a single juror. This low number is accounted for by the following: 1) the relatively low number of jurors who were called; 2) there were a number of days when no jurors were called (8/2, 8/15 and 8/17, according to intern reports); 3) on August 8<sup>th</sup>, a storm caused widespread transit delays, likely keeping many jurors from reporting; and 4) as stated elsewhere, booths were not operated the final week of the month.

**Jamaica:** In August of 2007, 9 jurors approached the booth with 13 questions and comments. The most frequent comments (7) were appreciative ones.<sup>9</sup> CJP believes that the low number of juror comments and questions is due to: 1) the relatively low number of jurors called to serve; and 2) the CJP booth's location in the back of the jury room, out of sight for most jurors.

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<sup>i</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. No jurors were called in August at 111 Centre Street 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor. All booths were closed the last week of August, because very few jurors were expected to be called, and most interns completed their internships earlier in the month.

<sup>ii</sup> Number of jurors reporting by courthouse in August of 2007:

60 Centre Street	823;
100 Centre Street	2,173;
111 Centre Street, 11th Fl.	1,532;
320 Jay Street	3,062;
Bronx	1,676;
Kew Gardens	1,267;
<u>Jamaica</u>	2,556.
TOTAL:	13,089

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<sup>9</sup> Appreciative comments included: "The judge's speech was very informative. I enjoyed that Sutphin is very clean."; and "The court officer, Herb, was very funny and very entertaining. He went above and beyond to make us all feel well informed and very comfortable. The seats were comfortable and it was nice to sit down and enjoy the movies they were airing. It was also pleasant to have access to the internet throughout the course of the day. Many of my fellow jurors that I spoke with agreed with my observations."