



Citizens Jury Project Report July 2008

Summary

In July of 2008, the Citizens Jury Project (CJP) of the Fund for Modern Courts operated Ombudservice booths in eight (8) 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 July, 446 jurors approached the booths (or used the virtual ombudservice online), with 477 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 general recommendation.

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 July of 2008.² At three (3) sites, questions about procedure and what jurors could/were required to do were the most frequently asked. Because 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.³

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: Comments on CJP - CJP usually does not refer to appreciative comments received concerning our program in our monthly reports; however, this month we make an exception. Amongst other things, jurors said they value having an ombudservice at courthouses.⁴

New York County

60 Centre Street: During July, the CJP Ombudservice booth was approached by 102 jurors with 107 questions and comments. The most common questions concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (58). Thirteen (13) juror questions were in regard to procedure and what jurors could/were required to do. Four (4) comments were appreciative ones.⁵

100 Centre Street: During July, 74 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 82 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (43). Fifteen (15) juror questions were in regard to procedure and what jurors could/were required to do. There were five (5) appreciative comments.⁶

111 Centre Street, 3rd floor: During July, 48 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 52 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (20). Fifteen (15) questions concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do.

Kings County

320 Jay Street: During July, 28 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth and raised 28 questions and comments. The most common questions concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do (16). Five (5) questions had to do with the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse.

360 Adams Street: During July, 67 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 71 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do (29). There were fifteen (15) questions concerning the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse. Five (5) questions were asked about computer usage; another five (5) came from late jurors.

Bronx County

During July, 17 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 19 questions and comments. The most common questions (4) concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse.

Queens County

Kew Gardens: During July, CJP interns recorded 93 questions and comments from 87 jurors. The most common questions (58) concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse. There were nineteen (19) questions concerning procedure and what jurors could/were required to do, and eight (8) regarding computer usage.

Jamaica: During July, CJP interns recorded 25 questions and comments from 21 jurors. The most common questions (7) concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do. Eleven (11) questions concerned the use of computers. There were also five (5) questions regarding computer usage.

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. The assembly room at 111 Centre, 11th Fl. was closed for the summer.

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 Generally, such questions 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, "I think that your organization does a great job in taking comments and suggestions about jury duty."; "I think it's good that someone is here taking stock of what we think."; "I've just completed two days of jury duty and wanted to reach out and say thanks for your efforts to make the experience so pleasant."; and "Great lunch maps!"

⁵ Appreciative comments included, "It's a lot more comfortable in there than I imagined it would be."; "Having wifi here is great!"; and "It is so nice that we have many books provided to us!" Another comment concerned court personnel – see endnote 6, below.

⁶ Appreciative comments included these, from a single juror:

As a busy professional, I really appreciate the free wi-fi and quiet space to work. I was able to stay in touch with my office during breaks and waiting time. I also appreciate how clearly and pleasantly all procedures and expectations were communicated to the group of prospective jurors.

Everyone here has been incredibly kind and friendly, from the staff at 60 Centre Street who printed me a duplicate summons (without making me feel like I was imposing at all) to the security staff at 100 Centre Street where I served.

But I must call special attention to the jury room supervisor, whose name is Larry. He was fabulous--taking time not only to explain what we had to do, but also the reasons for the processes. I really felt like a valued part of the justice system the whole time I was there.