



**Citizens Jury Project Report
May 2008**

Summary

In May 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 May, 368 jurors approached the booths (or used the virtual ombudservice online), with 402 questions or comments.²

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 in May of 2008.³ At two (2) sites, questions about procedure and what jurors could/were required to do were the most frequently asked. At the last courthouse, appreciative comments and questions about computers topped the list.

General Recommendation and Note:

Recommendation: Using LCD displays/monitors and/or dry-erase boards to inform jurors --

Two different jurors suggested that court personnel should put the names of the people they have called on the computers, so that jurors will easily be able to check.

A somewhat similar suggestion came from one of our interns, who asked whether a dry-erase board could be useful in displaying information (not including names called).⁴

Using a visual approach, in addition to making announcements, could be very helpful. To quote an educator, William Glasser:

We Learn . . .
10% of what we read; 20% of what we hear; 30% of what we see;
50% of what we see and hear. . . .

CJP can, of course, only assist in identifying juror needs – in this case for additional ways to keep jurors informed. Whether adding speakers, or a “red-light/green-light system”, or using TV monitors or dry-erase boards would be feasible and helpful is best determined by others. It may be that none of these “solutions” is “best”. If so, CJP hopes that these ideas will spur you to think of others.

Note: Procedure - Many questions that interns are asked concern procedure and what jurors can and are required to do.⁵ 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 May, the CJP Ombudservice booth was approached by 25 jurors with 26 questions and comments. The most common questions concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (12 inquiries). Six (6) jurors asked questions regarding procedure and what jurors could/were required to do.

100 Centre Street: During May, 73 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 80 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse (42). Seventeen (17) jurors asked questions regarding procedure and what jurors could/were required to do. One (1) juror offered both appreciative comments and suggestions.⁶

111 Centre Street, 3rd floor: During May, 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 (9).

111 Centre Street, 11th floor: During May, the CJP Ombudservice booth addressed comments from 49 jurors, who approached 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 (17). There also were thirteen (13) questions concerning procedure and what jurors could/were required to do. There were four (4) complaints, two (2) of which should be addressed.⁷ **Recommendation:** Interns have observed a long line of jurors standing outside of the assembly room. CJP suggests signage and announcements telling jurors that they can sit on benches outside the assembly room and hear what is happening inside. CJP is aware that, at least some of the time, second-day jurors are told to arrive slightly later than first-day jurors, and we believe this is a good practice. Further, second-day jurors who still arrive early should be told to wait outside of the assembly room, to make room for first-day jurors who have not yet seen the orientation video.

Kings County

320 Jay Street: During May, 32 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth and raised 36 questions and comments. The most common questions concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do (16). There also were seven (7) questions concerning the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse.

360 Adams Street: During May, 79 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 86 questions and comments. The questions most frequently asked concerned procedure and what jurors could/were required to do (48). There were also eighteen (18) questions concerning the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse.

Bronx County

During May, 71 jurors approached the CJP Ombudservice booth with 76 questions and comments. The most common questions (46) concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse. *Notes:* **1) Inoperable computers** - In March and April, CJP reported intern findings regarding the unavailability of computers for jurors. Unfortunately, this problem has not been addressed. On June 16th, an intern “counted 25 computers, and out of that number only five (5) computers seem to be operating correctly.” In response to a CJP phone call made on June 18th, a court clerk said he believes a work order is in, and that eight (8) computers are working; **2) Incorrect listings on nyjuor.gov.** On June 16th and 17th, CJP attempted to call court personnel to learn more about the inoperable computers. The phone numbers listed on the nyjuor.gov website (the same ones relied upon by the public) were not working. Likewise, a link that should have allowed for sending an email is inoperable. Through OCA, CJP learned that these numbers were changed. That change was made on or around May 30th. The new Commission of Jurors informed us that the website is being updated, and new summonses have been ordered.

Queens County

Kew Gardens: During May, CJP interns recorded 11 questions and comments from 9 jurors. The most common questions (4) concerned the location of particular places and/or amenities/facilities inside and outside of the courthouse. There was a concern, and a related suggestion, regarding difficulty in hearing the judge speak during orientation; another suggestion involved TV watching.⁸ *Recommendation:* Use a microphone during orientation.

Jamaica: During May, CJP interns recorded 12 questions and comments from 10 jurors. The most common questions (4) concerned the use of computers. Four (4) appreciative comments were received.⁹ **Recommendation:** Interns have observed that the judge who speaks to jurors during orientation cannot be heard. We recommend that a microphone be used, during this part of orientation. **Notes: 1) Computers** - Since the beginning of June all computers for jurors have not been working; however, wi-fi service has been available; **2) Lack of announcements** - Interns once again report that during most of the time they operate the booth in Sutphin, no announcements are being made regarding CJP. Failure to inform jurors that an intern is available (in addition to the placement of the booth, at the back of the room, unseen by jurors) undermines the purpose of the ombudservice.

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 The relatively low number of juror comments received during May is due, at least in part, to intern availability. Three students completed their internships early in the month, and others were away on vacation.

³ 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.

⁴ The intern thought that a dry-erase board might be helpful in answering certain frequently asked questions by late jurors.

When a step is covered, a box can be checked off. Late jurors will know what has been covered, and those on time know what is expected of them. The list might look something like this:

Check	Task	If you missed this, here is what you should do:
	Orientation	Go to room ***
	Video	
	Judge	
	Summons collection	

⁵ 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?”

⁶ “The room is comfortable, employees are polite, and cubicles are great. Wireless is terrific. Compared to my last visit 15 years ago, this is heaven. Please provide additional cubicles - not nearly enough here. In fact, provide more seats- Late comers are sitting on the floor.”

⁷ “There are people who come with their laptops and [clog] the cubicles so that people can’t use the court provided ones. Also people don’t observe the time limit on the computers.”

⁸ “My concern is the inability to hear the judge and court clerk. I highly suggest that anyone who speaks in court have the use of a microphone. There is too much noise in court room to hear questions.” Another juror suggested “Since the room is so big, I think part of the room should not have TV it is distracting for people who want to read.”

⁹ Appreciative comments included: “This courthouse is very clean and well organized.”, and “I enjoy being here. I think this courthouse is very clean and the court officer (Herb) is very funny.” One juror commented on enjoying the movie (Independence Day).