



National Program to Increase Citizen Participation in Jury Service Through Jury Innovations

A collaboration of the National Center for State Courts, the Council for Court Excellence, and the Trial Court Leadership Center of Maricopa County (Phoenix)

The willingness of citizens to serve as jurors has been steadily declining for years. Some courts have reported that the events of September 11, 2001, had the effect of restoring some pride in jury service. However, pervasive problems of poor use of citizens' time, inadequate facilities, and generally poor treatment continue to erode public support for the jury system. How courts treat individuals who report for jury service, how well citizens understand trial proceedings, and how jurors perceive their in-court experiences are all factors that affect public perception of, and satisfaction with, the jury system. Courts have a responsibility to perform at a higher level with respect to citizens serving as jurors and to improve every aspect of their jury systems.

The National Program to Increase Citizen Participation in Jury Service is established to take advantage of momentum from the first-ever National Jury Summit in 2001, which was led by Chief Judge Judith Kaye of the New York Unified Court System and the National Center for State Courts. The purpose of the program is to increase citizen participation by bring forward a series of innovations. The National Center leads the program through its Center for Jury Studies, the preeminent provider of jury assistance services to trial courts across the country. Program funding is being requested from a variety of funders, including law firms, foundations, and other interested organizations and associations.

The program promotes public awareness and understanding of jury service and supports state and local court improvements to the jury system. The program will deliver the tools and technical assistance needed by judges, attorneys, and court administrators to meet these objectives. Following the basic themes of the National Jury Summit, the program will reach out to citizens and focus on improving the conditions of jury service. This program ties the commitment of the courts to improve the conditions of jury service with materials and resources needed to promote the jury process to the public. In addition, the program enlists the help of the community.

The innovative practices that will be offered through the national jury program are detailed in the National Center's publication [Jury Trial Innovations](#) and are listed below under the program's two major themes—citizen outreach and improving conditions of jury service.

Citizen Outreach

- Citizen Education Campaigns
 - Media Relations
 - Public Service Advertising
 - School Programs
 - Juror Appreciation Week
 - Community Speakers Bureaus
 - User-Friendly, Informative Summons
 - Jury Orientation and Answers to FAQs via Public Outlets
- Pursuing Non-responders

Improving Conditions of Jury Service

- One-Day/One-Trial Terms of Jury Service
- Employment and Salary Protection
- Ease of Postponement
- Jury Facility Improvements
- Improved Communications with Jurors
 - Pre-instruction on Law
 - Note Taking
 - Interim Summations in Lengthy Cases
 - Improved Jury Instructions
 - Copies of Instructions for Jurors
 - Structured Process for Juror Questions
 - Juror Notebooks for Complex Cases

Technical Assistance

The Program will provide direct technical assistance to state and local courts to implement these innovations. The ability to visit a court, discuss its methods, and recommend improvements is a necessary part of the reform process. Courts need assurance that the improvements can be adopted within their culture, and they need assistance to plan their adoption. Technical assistance will be provided to courts through on-site evaluations of jury system operations and participation in state and local court improvement programs. Technical assistance can include training and presentations to judicial, bar, and citizens groups on improvements in summoning, qualification, in-court treatment of jurors, or any of the innovations identified above.

State of the States – A Compendium

Many courts have developed innovative methods to promote citizen participation in the jury system, yet these ideas have not been collected for distribution to other interested courts. A compendium is being prepared which will include how these ideas were adopted, whether there are evaluation data, and if rules or caselaw have addressed these issues. The “State of the States” will be the first encyclopedia of each jury system’s statewide requirements as well as discretionary local practices. The compendium will serve as the information baseline for innovation start-up and implementation.

Prescriptive Packages

Prescriptive packages will be developed to describe highly recommended practices in four priority areas:

- [Improving the Response to Jury Summons](#)
- [Improving Jury Instruction Comprehensibility](#)
- [Model Legislation and Rules](#)
- [Effective Jury Management in Urban Courts](#)

The prescriptive packages will be used as technical assistance tools in the national jury program and will be made widely available through the National Center for State Courts and state judicial education programs. These packages will help courts implement improvements by providing details of what was done, the resources needed, and lessons learned. Model forms and implementation considerations will be included in the prescriptive packages.

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Jury system information is available at www.ncsconline.org.
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