



## **Community Outreach to Promote Jury Service**

As we enter the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the fundamental right to a trial by a jury of our peers is in jeopardy. Nationally, only 25% of citizens who are summoned for jury service in urban state and federal trial courts appear for service. Returns are higher in less urban areas but still well below desirable levels. Many citizens who do appear do so only after deferring their service one or more times. Once they appear for jury duty, angling to be dismissed from a jury panel is not uncommon. As a result, many urban courts are in increasing danger of being unable to form juries that are truly representative of their diverse communities.

Ironically, most of those who actually do serve as jurors emerge with positive views of the judicial system. Indeed, in a 1999 public opinion survey done for the American Bar Association, 69 % of those polled said juries are the most important part of our justice system.<sup>a</sup>

To respond to these conditions, for ten years beginning in 1990 the Council for Court Excellence (CCE) partnered with the federal and local trial courts of the Washington region to develop and conduct annual Jury Service Appreciation programs with two purposes: to encourage citizens to serve on juries, and to thank citizens for their past community service in this area.

### **Possible Activities**

CCE varied the media message each fall, when the campaign was traditionally undertaken. With the help of funding partners from the business and foundation communities, CCE Jury Service Appreciation activities have included:

- widespread public service advertising on buses, in public buildings, and on broadcast media;
- producing an interactive mock-trial video (*Guilty or Not Guilty? You Decide*) and bringing it to school audiences who participate in seeking a unanimous verdict;
- bringing judges, lawyers, and court administrators into school classrooms;
- participating in radio interview programs on the jury subject; and
- publishing an informative brochure about jury service in the local and federal trial courts, *Jury Duty: Tips for Citizens*.

### **Promoting Jury Service throughout the Community**

Many other jurisdictions have followed the Council for Court Excellence's lead in promoting jury service. Courts in Arizona, California, Kentucky, Maryland, Minnesota, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and Virginia, to name a few, have all adapted some or all of the public relations approaches first developed by the Council for Court Excellence. For communities, court systems, bar groups, and others who are considering some form of jury service public awareness program, there are a number of discrete actions CCE would recommend. They appear below.

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<sup>a</sup> This fact sheet was developed in 2000 and the statements and statistics in this paragraph and the one above it are reflective of the available information at the time.



### **Steps to Consider When Planning a Jury Service Public Awareness Campaign**

- Securing the commitment by the Chief Judge to back the jury service outreach campaign
- Appointing a senior person in each court responsible for follow through during the entire campaign
- Selecting a jury service slogan for the campaign
- Obtaining appropriate proclamations from Mayor, Governor, County Council, etc., proclaiming Jury Service Appreciation Week/Month
- Planning a press conference including bar leaders, community leaders, judiciary, etc. for media coverage and presentation of proclamation/resolution
- Compiling court system data regarding jury service experience in the locality
- Deciding on the campaign's focus within the community
- Developing a list of persons willing to speak with members of the press about jury service
- Establishing a poster campaign to catch the attention of the public and the press
- Contacting local radio, television, and cable stations, and newspapers about running public service announcements about Jury Service Week throughout the campaign
- Submitting press releases announcing the campaign to all local radio, television, and cable stations and all newspapers
- Providing press kits to media targets and all media contacts who respond to the press release
- Securing donated advertising space from local transportation systems
- Advertising Jury Service Week in public buildings—city halls, libraries, schools and community colleges, courts, hospitals and clinics, etc.
- Securing private sector donations (e.g., printing, advertising) to supplement public resources for the public awareness campaign.