

CGJA Member/Chapter Forum: Chapter-Court Partnership Report

During the 2018 CGJA Annual Conference the El Dorado County Grand Jury Association hosted a discussion centered on examples of interactions between local chapters/associations and the court.

Ray Frisbie representing Shasta County chapter discussed their actions to support the court to recruit and train both prospective jurors and impaneled jurors. These actions include:

- Placing of street banners in different areas of the city requesting applicants
- Providing speakers to promote grand jury applications at various organizations
- Providing informational meetings for prospective jurors
- Providing training about local government to jurors immediately upon impanelment
- Placing Public Service Announcements in local written, radio and TV media
- Producing brochures and bookmarks
- Meeting regularly with the designated court representative to develop recruitment strategies
- Developing a Personal Services Agreement (contract) between the chapter and court to define recruitment actions and chapter reimbursement (copy of sample agreement can be found on CGJA website at Chapters & Associations > Chapter Resource Documents>Juror Recruitment
- Arranging to play the CGJA video “Agents of Change” as part of a video loop on the Superior Court petit jury ready room monitor
- Assisting the court with the development of applicant interview questions
- Participating in applicant interviews and providing recommendations to the court
- A significant portion of court provided funds are used for a series of newspaper ads
- Chapter does a paper screening and rating of all applicants after contacting three references for each applicant, these reference checks have proven to be very informative

Becky Castaneda Grand Jury Coordinator, Superior Court County of Sacramento discussed actions she has been involved with during the last sixteen years. The last nine years she has worked with the local CGJA chapter. These actions include:

- Developing and then improving a standard questionnaire for prospective applicants
- Initiating applicant background investigations
- Coordinating local chapter involvement with applicant interviews

- Utilizing the local chapter as an information resource on grand jury subjects
- Local chapter assists with applicant interviews
- Working closely with a local chapter representative on many grand jury matters

Larry Herbst representing San Luis Obispo County chapter discussed their actions to support the court. Points of contact for their chapter are the Presiding Judge, Court Executive Officer and the Jury Commissioner.

These actions include:

- Writing recruitment ads and Op-ed articles for local newspaper
- Making presentation to the Board of Supervisors for Grand Jury Awareness Month
- Developing and distributing grand jury informational brochures and flyers throughout the county
- Providing speakers for social clubs and various organizations
- Developing Public Service Announcements for local radio (NPR) and TV stations which have proven to be effective
- Developing two-step interview process for new applicants
- The chapter conducts initial round of interviews
- Refer all applicants to review GJ reports on CGJA website prior to initial interview
- Recommendations are forwarded to the court prior to second round of court interviews
- Develop follow-up questions to focus on specific areas for second round interviews
- In SLO County all Superior Court judges participate in second round interviews providing feedback to the Presiding Judge

Lessons learned in SLO County:

- It takes considerable effort by the chapter to gain confidence and establish relationships with the court to be involved in both recruitment and interview processes
- Must continually alter approach to find what works
- Must develop a relationship with the court appointed representative(s)
- Must gain access to PJ/SJ to create relationships
- Need to review process each year for successes and failures
- Trial and error required to tailor approach to court
- Can never give up or let lack of progress impact chapter efforts

After the above was presented a discussion by attendees produced additional valuable experiences and ideas:

- The FCC requires radio and TV stations to air a minimum amount of Public Service Announcements
- Chapters should develop media relationships to promote exposure for specific grand jury reports
- One county raised per diem to attract people living further out
- One county was improving quality of applicants by conducting behavioral interviews and eliminating “yes” or “no” type of questions
- One county is utilizing video conferencing so jurors from remote areas can participate
- Some counties have developed online applications making it easier to apply
- Some courts have partnered with the county to help fund the court’s recruitment responsibility

In summary, it is apparent there are many ways a chapter can assist the court in executing its grand jury responsibilities. First a relationship needs to be established and maintained. CGJA’s website already lists many ideas and products to assist in recruiting. However, the CGJA could provide more service to the chapters by establishing an information bank of chapter-court methods. Information could be solicited from chapters and courts even in counties not represented by a CGJA chapter and added to existing resources. This will be explored further, stay tuned-in.