

CENTER  
FOR  
COURT  
INNOVATION

ANNUAL REPORT



Photo: Manuel Lariño

2009

# ANNUAL REPORT

## 2009

The Center for Court Innovation is a public-private partnership that works with the justice system to reduce crime, aid victims, and improve public trust in justice. It pursues these goals in a variety of ways: through demonstration projects in New York that test new approaches to justice; through hands-on training and technical assistance with criminal justice reformers around the U.S. and the world; and through the dissemination of cutting-edge research and ideas about how to improve the justice system.

The year 2009 was a time of both challenges and opportunities. The global economic crisis forced the Center to tighten its belt and make hard choices about its priorities. Yet even in the midst of fiscal uncertainty, the Center remained committed to its core mission: seeking out new ideas and testing their application in real-world settings. Among the new initiatives launched in 2009 were:

- New York City Community Cleanup, a citywide community service program modeled after the work pioneered at the Midtown Community Court, Red Hook Community Justice Center, and Bronx Community Solutions;
- QUEST Futures, an initiative to provide intensive mental health services to young people so that judges in Queens Family Court have options beyond incarceration; and
- The Staten Island Youth Justice Center, which seeks to reduce both youthful offending and the justice system's dependence on detention.

Other programs in the planning stages include a community campaign to end gun violence in Crown Heights and a respite program designed to offer a community-based alternative to youth prisons for those who do not present a serious risk to the community but who cannot return home for one reason or another.

In recognition of the Center's track record of justice system reform, it was awarded the 2009 Peter F. Drucker Award for Nonprofit Innovation, a distinction that includes a \$100,000 prize. Selected from a field of

over 650 organizations, the Drucker Award committee recognized the Center for, among other things, changing “the way that the major players in the system—judges, attorneys, criminal justice officials—think about their jobs and the impact they’re having.” Coming a decade after the Center received the Innovations in American Government Award, the Drucker Prize is testament not only to the Center’s staying power but also its ability to remain at the cutting edge of justice reform.

This report documents some of the Center’s primary accomplishments during 2009.

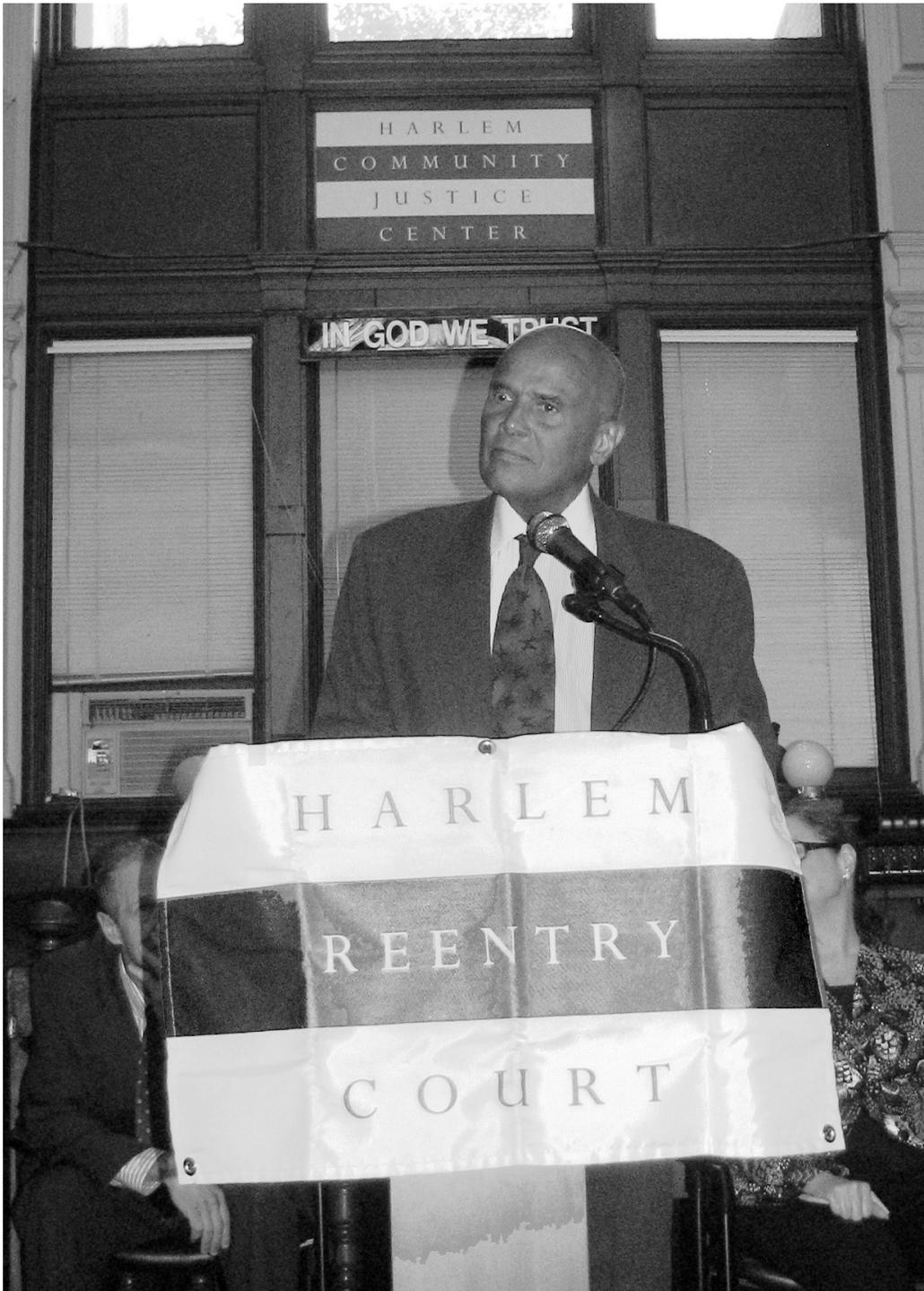
## JUVENILE JUSTICE

In the wake of a U.S. Department of Justice investigation that revealed widespread abuse in New York State’s “youth prisons,” the cause of juvenile justice reform gathered considerable momentum in 2009. The Center for Court Innovation operates a broad range of juvenile justice programs, including programs to help young offenders avoid future involvement in the criminal justice system, programs that work with at-risk youth to help them stay out of trouble, and initiatives that address the needs of crime victims, helping them heal from trauma.

One of the Center’s newest programs is QUEST Futures, which expands on Queens Engagement Strategies for Teens, an after-school program for youth who have delinquency matters pending in Queens Family Court. QUEST Futures is specifically geared to young people with mental illness. Guided by a clinical team that serves as a bridge between the juvenile justice and mental health systems, QUEST Futures works with young people beginning at the earliest stages of the delinquency process while their cases are being adjudicated and remains involved with them throughout the life of their cases, facilitating screening, assessment, treatment, and case management. By the end of the year, QUEST Futures had accepted 79 program participants, both as voluntary referrals and mandates from Family Court judges. Encouraged by this promising start, in late 2009 the Office of Court Administration asked the Center to expand its QUEST Futures program to serve as an alternative to placement for adjudicated delinquents with mental disorders.

The Center’s presence on Staten Island expanded with the establishment of the Staten Island Youth Justice Center, which consists of two principal components: a youth court and an alternative-to-detention program. Modeled after QUEST, the Staten Island alternative-to-detention program opened in April and is designed to reduce the likelihood of offending, ensure attendance at all required court appearances, and promote school attendance for young people with cases pending in Richmond County Family Court. Through rigorous monitoring combined with social services and support, virtually all people who successfully complete the program go on to receive community-based dispositions. In its first eight months, the project enrolled 40 youths and maintained a compliance rate of 72 percent.

Other juvenile justice initiatives include the Youth Justice Board, an after-school program that engages teens in public policy debates; attendance court, a school-based early intervention program for chronic truants; and youth court, which trains teenagers to serve as judge, jurors, and advocates, hearing actual cases involving their peers. The Center’s first youth court, located in Red Hook, held 160 hearings in 2009 and had a compliance rate of 91 percent. In the years since creating the Red Hook Youth Court, the Center has replicated the model in



Harry Belafonte speaks at a Harlem Parole Reentry Court graduation in September.

Photo: Robert V. Wolf, Center for Court Innovation

Harlem, Crown Heights, Greenpoint, Newark, N.J., and Staten Island. The Staten Island Youth Court is expanding the model by handling more serious cases: in collaboration with the Richmond County District Attorney's Office, the Staten Island Youth Court became a condition of disposition in selected low-level criminal court matters for defendants between 16 and 18. Participants who successfully complete their sanction receive a conditional dismissal of their charges. In 2009, the Staten Island Youth Court handled 135 cases and posted a compliance rate of 85 percent. In addition to operating youth courts, the Center is leading a statewide effort to formulate and disseminate recommended practices for the nearly 100 youth courts around the state.

The Center also participated in New York Governor David A. Paterson's Task Force on Transforming Juvenile Justice. Deputy Director Alfred Siegel co-chaired a sub-committee of the task force, which garnered headlines in December with the release of its report, "Charting a New Course: A Blueprint for Transforming Juvenile Justice in New York State."

In the months ahead, the Center plans to continue to deepen its involvement in juvenile justice reform, creating new options for Family Court judges so they don't have to rely so heavily on custodial dispositions and seeking to promote a deeper system-wide investment in prevention and evidence-based practices.

## **DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND CHILD PROTECTIVE INITIATIVES**

The Center for Court Innovation provides support to the New York State Unified Court System in the development and operation of a statewide network of domestic violence courts and integrated domestic violence courts. The Center also serves as a national resource encouraging innovation around the U.S.

In 2009, the Center planned and hosted two national domestic violence open houses—one in New York City, the other in Ann Arbor, Michigan—which allowed participants to share ideas and observe first hand how domestic violence courts work. In addition to the open houses, the Center held a national web-based conference (or "webinar") for sites interested in starting or enhancing a domestic violence court.

With the help of the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, the Center also aided reformers around the country through the National Passport to Adulthood program, which offers tools to ensure that the complex issues faced by youth in foster care are addressed in a timely and thorough manner.

In New York, the Center worked with the court system to implement the Integrated Domestic Violence Court Initiative (IDV-I) in seven counties upstate. This project is an effort to provide the benefits of a traditional integrated domestic violence court to counties that do not yet have one and to serve areas with smaller and more dispersed populations.

With funding from the National Institute for Justice, the Center for Court Innovation recently completed a study of criminal domestic violence courts across the country that explores the rationale for specialized courts, how they operate, and how they vary from state to state.

In the year ahead, the Center plans a special focus on women arrested for prostitution who are also victims. For example, with support from the Oak Foundation, the Center will work to identify trafficking victims arrested

for prostitution at the Midtown Community Court and Queens Criminal Court. And, with funds from the Office of Violence Against Women, the Center will provide services to prostitutes who are victims of domestic violence and sexual assault at Midtown Community Court and Bronx Community Solutions.

## REENTRY

The Harlem Parole Reentry Court, which helps parolees make the transition from life in prison to responsible citizenship, entered its 10th year of operation in 2009.

The court is a project of the Harlem Community Justice Center, the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services, and the Division of Parole, linking parolees to a wide range of social services, including drug treatment, vocational services, health care, and mental health treatment. To promote increased accountability, participants are required to return to the justice center frequently to meet with case managers and parole officers and appear before an administrative law judge, who closely monitors their compliance with court orders.

In 2009, the Parole Reentry Court was awarded one of 15 National Second Chance Act Demonstration Grants, which will allow the court to increase its number of participants and expand service provision. The year ahead will see the publication of an impact evaluation of the Harlem Reentry Court. Preliminary results indicate reduced re-arrests and re-convictions among participants but also increased revocations for technical violations.

In 2009, the Harlem Community Justice Center also continued to host the Upper Manhattan Reentry Task Force, a collaboration of state and city government agencies, community-based organizations, and academic partners seeking to reduce recidivism and enhance public safety. In February, the Task Force launched a blog, <http://rethinkingreentry.blogspot.com/>, which attracted visitors from 60 countries. Also in 2009, the Task Force received additional funding through the New York State Department of Criminal Justice Services, which will allow it to implement a pilot collaborative case management initiative with the New York City Police Department, New York State Division of Parole, and Manhattan District Attorney's Office.

## ADDICTION

On April 7, 2009, New York Governor David Paterson signed into law a bill that dramatically changed drug sentencing laws and significantly expanded the pool of offenders eligible for diversion to drug treatment. The New York State Court System, under the leadership of Chief Judge Jonathan Lippman and Chief Administrative Law Judge Ann Pfau, has enlisted the Center for Court Innovation's help in responding to this dramatic change in the law.

The Center worked closely with the court system to identify all eligible offenders, ensure sufficient substance and alcohol treatment, provide technology for tracking and evaluation, and train key court staff, including judges. The New York Community Trust has helped to underwrite some of this work.

The Center for Court Innovation also developed the first statewide online learning system for drug courts. The system, which will go live in 2010 and be regularly updated and expanded, includes presentations by nation-



Photo: Roberto Julbe, Center for Court Innovation

Rep. Nydia Velazquez is the keynote speaker in April at a ceremony celebrating youth programs at the Red Hook Community Justice Center.

al experts, a resource library with materials on best practices, video interviews of drug treatment court practitioners, and a virtual tour of an established adult drug court.

In Nassau County, the Center supported the implementation of new evidence-based screening, assessment, and treatment practices for juvenile offenders. The effort is part of the Reclaiming Futures model, funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, which encourages better coordination of resources and more effective delivery of services to juvenile drug court participants.

In the coming year, with support from the U.S. Department of Justice, the Center for Court Innovation will continue to support the work of drug courts nationally, providing training and technical assistance to states that are seeking to institutionalize drug court operations into a statewide system, investigating legal and ethical concerns raised by drug courts, and studying several locations where drug courts have run into challenges in order to mine lessons for the field.

## COMMUNITY JUSTICE

In June 2009, New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg and other city, state, and federal officials announced the launch of a new Center for Court Innovation initiative, NYC Community Cleanup, a court-mandated community service project that seeks to address neighborhood hot spots and eyesores. NYC Community Cleanup puts low-level offenders to work repairing conditions of disorder throughout New York City. The goal is to create meaningful work projects that emphasize the values of immediacy, visibility, and accountability. In the initiative's first three months, participants collected over 3,000 bags of trash and contributed the equivalent of over \$30,000 in labor toward making New York City neighborhoods cleaner and more livable.

Meanwhile, the Center's community courts continue to test new strategies to improve neighborhood quality of life. A community survey, conducted annually in Red Hook, Brooklyn, found that 94 percent of residents feel positively about having a community court in their neighborhood—a dramatic turnaround from the days before the Red Hook Community Justice Center opened when only 12 percent expressed support for local courts.

In June, the Midtown Community Court expanded its catchment area to include a new police precinct on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. The court also enlarged its menu of alternative sanctions to include an onsite psycho-educational group designed to motivate homeless offenders to access permanent housing. Another new Midtown Court program seeks to vacate homeless individuals' old warrants in exchange for the completion of social services, including substance abuse detox and psychiatric evaluations.

The Harlem Community Justice Center expanded its work on several fronts. In addition to enlarging its work with prisoners returning from prison, the justice center received funding from the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services to launch a Juvenile Gang Task Force, which will assess the extent of gang presence and influence in East and Central Harlem and make recommendations to increase public safety. In a similar vein, the Center has also begun planning the implementation of a new anti-violence program designed to prevent gun violence in Crown Heights, which will be based at the Crown Heights Community Mediation Center and modeled after Ceasefire in Chicago.

The Center's Bronx Community Solutions seeks to increase sentencing options for judges handling misdemeanor cases. Research indicates that Bronx Community Solutions has reduced the use of jail at arraignments by 40 percent, raised the rate of compliance with alternative sanctions to 70 percent, and, through the provision of community restitution sentences, invested 70,000 hours of labor each year to help improve the borough.

Beyond New York, in 2009 the Center worked with the federal Bureau of Justice Assistance to select community courts in Dallas, Hartford, and Seattle to serve as regional mentors for jurisdictions seeking to improve their handling of low-level criminal cases. The Center also supported numerous other jurisdictions in their efforts to build or expand community court programs. Among the new community courts slated to open in the coming months is one in Newark, New Jersey, where the Center has played a hands-on role in planning and implementation.

By the end of 2009, there were over 70 community courts in operation around the globe based on the model created by the Center.

## TRIBAL JUSTICE

With the support of the Bureau of Justice Assistance, the Center continued to provide tribal communities with technical assistance, encouraging formal collaborations between traditional tribal justice systems and state and local court systems and identifying and disseminating best practices developed in Indian country that could help strengthen public safety initiatives elsewhere in the United States.

The initiative, which is called the Tribal Justice Exchange, offers a range of services including on-site needs assessments to assist tribal communities in developing community-based problem-solving strategies and visits to the Center's demonstration projects to see problem-solving justice in action. The Center's activities in 2009 included consulting work with the Navajo Nation, Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe, Winnebago Tribe, and Sokaogon Chippewa Community. The Center also hosted Navajo Nation Chief Justice Herb Yazzie and other Navajo judges at the Red Hook Community Justice Center. The Center will work with the Navajo Nation in the coming year to help develop the first community court in Indian country, to be located in Aneth, Utah.

The Center is also helping the Leech Lake-Cass County Wellness Court, the first joint jurisdiction state-tribal court in the country, to become a "mentor court" for other jurisdictions seeking to promote new state-tribal court collaboration.

## EXAMINING FAILURE

With support from the Bureau of Justice Assistance, the Center for Court Innovation continued its multi-faceted policy inquiry designed to identify and share lessons from failed criminal justice reform efforts. This included interviews with more than 70 practitioners and policymakers (offering real-life examples of how reform efforts sometimes fail to achieve their objectives); multiple conference presentations, including events hosted by the University of Pennsylvania and Princeton University; the creation of a web portal

(<http://www.courtinnovation.org/failure>); two monographs on lessons learned from failure ("Avoiding Failures of



After a neighborhood resident submitted a photo, left, of graffiti and trash at 64th St. and 53rd Ave. in Maspeth, Queens, a court-mandated crew from NYC Community Cleanup addresses the problem, below.



*Photo: Jason Collazo, Center for Court Innovation*

Implementation: Lessons from Process Evaluations,” and “Embracing Failure: Lessons for Court Managers”); and articles in the *National Law Journal*, *Court Manager*, *Executive Exchange*, and the *Journal of Court Innovation*. In 2010, the Urban Institute Press will publish a book by the Center on the topic of failure.

## BEYOND THE UNITED STATES

In 2009, the Center continued its efforts to work internationally.

Interest in the Center’s work remains particularly keen in the United Kingdom. In England, the Ministry of Justice released a report recommending the adoption of problem-solving principles in Magistrates Courts across the country. In addition, after visiting the Red Hook Community Justice Center, the Commission on English Prisons Today issued a report, in which it noted that “New York City illustrates that it is possible ... to reduce the prison population, to reduce crime, and to create safer communities.” The report credited the work of the Center, which it said had “pioneered a wide spectrum of justice strategies designed to rebuild communities and divert offenders from custody.” And Policy Exchange, a British think tank, released a report—written in collaboration with the Center—on the state of problem-solving courts in England and Wales. Building on this interest, in 2010 the Center will explore the possibility of creating a “Centre” in London working with the Hadley Trust and the Young Foundation.

Interest in the Center’s work is also keen in Asia and the Southern Hemisphere. New South Wales, Australia, launched a pilot designed to replicate Bronx Community Solutions. And Kristine Herman, a member of the Center’s domestic violence team, spent three months working in Afghanistan helping to establish the first specialized prosecution unit dedicated to investigating and prosecuting crimes of violence against women.

## RESEARCH

The Center’s vigorous investment in research was reflected in the publication of more than a dozen new reports as well as the launching of several new research initiatives. Among the reports completed in 2009 were:

- *Evaluating the Mentors in Violence Prevention Program: Preventing Gender Violence on a College Campus:* Researchers completed an evaluation of a project designed to reduce gender violence at Syracuse University. The study found that the project was implemented with high fidelity to the intended program model, and produced a significant decrease in sexist attitudes and an improved sense that participants could intervene to prevent gender violence.
- *Teens Educating about Community Health: Examining the Efficacy of an HIV/Substance Abuse Peer Education Program:* Researchers completed an evaluation of a teen peer education program. The study found that program participants gained significantly greater knowledge than a matched comparison group of the risks associated with HIV and substance abuse. Participants also showed a lower propensity for sexual experimentation and unprotected sex and less stereotypical attitudes regarding sex, race,

gender, and sexual preference than the comparison group. However, the program did not appear to influence attitudes related to alcohol, cigarettes, and drugs.

- *Children and Trauma: An Evaluation of the Bronx Child and Adolescent Witness Support Program:* Researchers completed the first-ever examination of the Bronx Child and Adolescent Witness Support Program. The study found that after participating in intensive therapeutic services, child and adolescent witnesses to violence experienced a significant reduction in multiple symptoms of trauma and that more time spent receiving program services was associated with a greater symptom reduction.

Going forward, the Center will begin a national study of the commercial sexual exploitation of children. Funded by the U.S. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, the study will involve victim interviews and analyses of the victim service communities in six different cities as well as analyses of arrest, prosecution, and recidivism patterns nationwide. Other new research projects include an effort to develop a child welfare data metrics report for Family Court and an impact evaluation of more than 80 New York State drug courts—potentially the largest such study ever completed.

## SPREADING THE WORD

The Center for Court Innovation disseminates lessons learned from its experiments through monographs, videos, on-line learning tools, roundtables, and presentations at conferences. In 2009, its web site, [www.courtinnovation.org](http://www.courtinnovation.org), reached over 88,000 visits a month and distributed over 343,000 copies of Center publications. The web site offers interviews, original research, and tools for practitioners. The Center also grew its web audience through the production of podcasts, which document conversations with leading thinkers and reformers. The podcasts are available for download directly from the Center's web site or for free from the iTunes store.

In addition to “virtual” visitors, the Center attracts flesh-and-blood visitors to its demonstration projects—in 2009, 650 judges, prosecutors, defense attorneys, court managers, social workers, law enforcement officers, and others paid their own way to visit the Center's projects. Seventy percent of visitors said they intended to put ideas they learned from their trip into practice in their home jurisdictions. To give just one example: In September, the New Orleans District Attorney adopted a database created by the Center to track assessment interviews and social service compliance for their adult diversion, juvenile diversion, domestic violence victim/witness, and criminal victim/witness caseloads.

The Center also assisted the Bureau of Justice Assistance in bringing together experts from around the country to discuss solutions to the inter-related problems of mortgage fraud, foreclosures, and neighborhood instability. The event was memorialized in a forthcoming report entitled, “A Full Response to an Empty House: Public Safety Strategies for Addressing Vacant and Abandoned Properties.”

Other publications from 2009 include “Race, Bias and Problem-Solving Courts,” published in the National Black Law Journal of Columbia University Law School, which discusses what is currently known about the inter-

section of race and problem-solving courts and highlighting key concerns that are ripe for future exploration and analysis, an analysis of innovative technology for the National Center for State Court's annual review of new court trends, and a toolkit created by the Youth Justice Board for schools, after-school programs, and not-for-profit organizations that are interested in engaging young people in local policy development.

The Center's work was featured in numerous newspapers and other media outlets in 2009, including stories on the Brooklyn Treatment Court on CNN and on the Brooklyn Mental Health Court on the BBC.

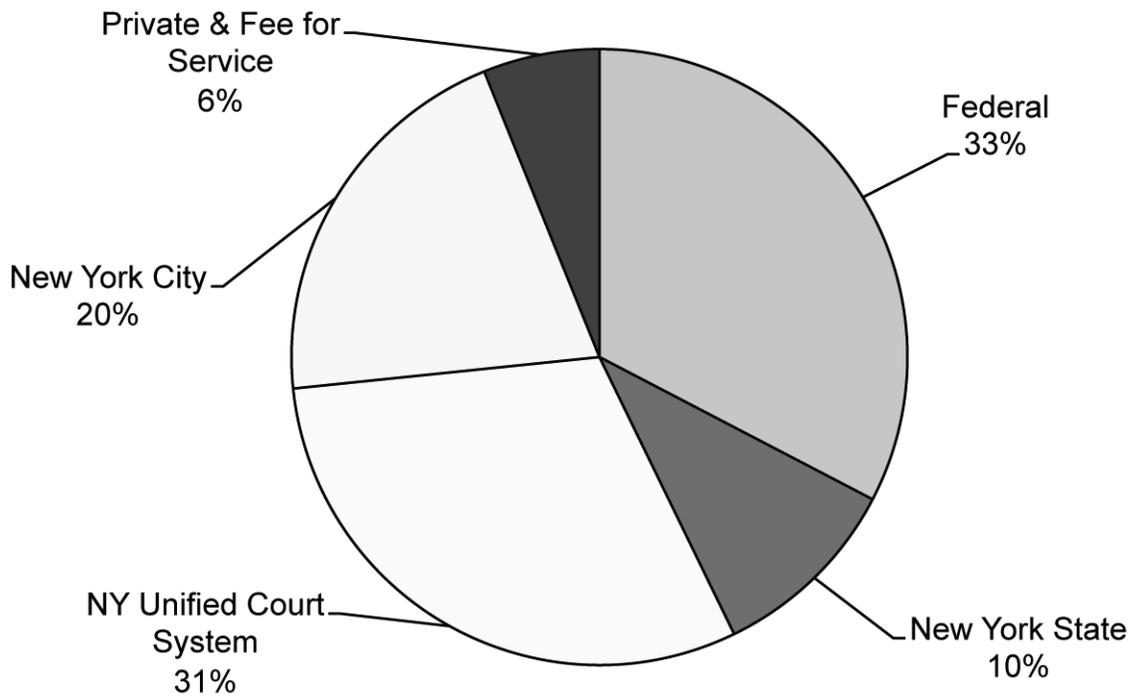
## **CONCLUSION**

The story of the Center for Court Innovation is one of constant experimentation. Through good times and bad, the Center remains committed to providing its constituents—that is, the judges, lawyers, litigants, victims of crime, community members and anyone impacted by the justice system—with new ideas and the tools needed to make the justice system both more fair and more effective.

With the help of its partners in government and the non-profit sector, the Center looks forward to the year ahead with renewed energy as it seeks to help the justice system live up to its highest ideals.

**Center for Court Innovation  
Fiscal Year 2009  
Sources of Funding**

**Total Funding = \$15.4 Million**



CENTER

FOR

COURT

INNOVATION

**Center for Court Innovation**

520 Eighth Avenue, 18th Floor

New York, New York 10018

212 397 3050 Fax 212 397 0985

[www.courtinnovation.org](http://www.courtinnovation.org)

---